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TechLife NEWS

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TUDOR-ERA MYSTERY

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LEADERS NOW THREATENED BY THE LAWS THAT HELPED BUILD THEIR BUSINESS

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ARTISTS FROM UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP ARE HEADING BACK TO TIKTOK AS A NEW LICENSING DEAL IS REACHED

Image: Paul Sancya

Artists from Universal Music Group, which include Drake, Adele, Bad Bunny and Billie Eilish, will be returning to TikTok as the two parties have struck a new licensing agreement following an approximately three-month long dispute.

The two sides said Thursday that they are "now working expeditiously to return music by artists represented by Universal Music Group and songwriters represented by Universal Music Publishing Group to TikTok in due course."

Taylor Swift, whose recently released album, "The Tortured Poets Department," has hit No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart, had some of her songs make a return to TikTok last month, but the details of how that exactly happened are unclear, according to Variety.

UMG said in January that it had not agreed to terms of a new deal with TikTok, and planned to stop licensing content from the artists it represents on the social media platform that is owned by ByteDance, as well as TikTok Music services.

Image: Mike Blake

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At the time, UMG had been pressing TikTok on three issues: “appropriate compensation for our artists and songwriters, protecting human artists from the harmful effects of AI, and online safety for TikTok’s users.”

TikTok pushed back against the claims by UMG, saying that it had reached ‘artist-first’ agreements with every other label and publisher.

On Thursday the two sides announced that their new agreement would give significant benefits to UMG’s global stable of artists, songwriters and labels and would return their music to TikTok.

“Music is an integral part of the TikTok ecosystem and we are pleased to have found a path forward with Universal Music Group,” TikTok CEO Shou Chew said in a statement. “We are committed to working together to drive value, discovery and promotion for all of UMG’s amazing artists and songwriters, and deepen their ability to grow, connect and engage with the TikTok community.”

Part of the new deal includes UMG and TikTok working together to find new monetization opportunities. They will also will work together on campaigns supporting UMG’s artists across genres and territories globally.

In addition, the companies will put their combined efforts toward ensuring that AI development across the music industry will protect human artistry and payments for artists and songwriters. TikTok will also work with UMG to remove unauthorized AI-generated music from the platform, as well as on tools to improve artist and songwriter attribution.

Image: Gilberto Tadday

Image: Jae C. Hong

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TikTok

TikTok plans to continue investing in building artist-centric tools that will help UMG artists realize their potential on the platform. Some tools include "Add to Music App", enhanced data and analytics, and integrated ticketing capabilities.

"We're gratified to renew our relationship with TikTok predicated on significant advancements in commercial and marketing opportunities as well as protections provided to our industry-leading roster on their platform," Michael Nash, chief digital officer and executive vice president, Universal Music Group, said in a statement.

While TikTok has settled its dispute with UMG, the future of the platform remains uncertain. Last month President Joe Biden signed legislation requiring TikTok parent ByteDance to sell to an approved buyer within a year or to shut down. It's not clear whether that law will survive an expected legal challenge or that ByteDance would agree to sell.

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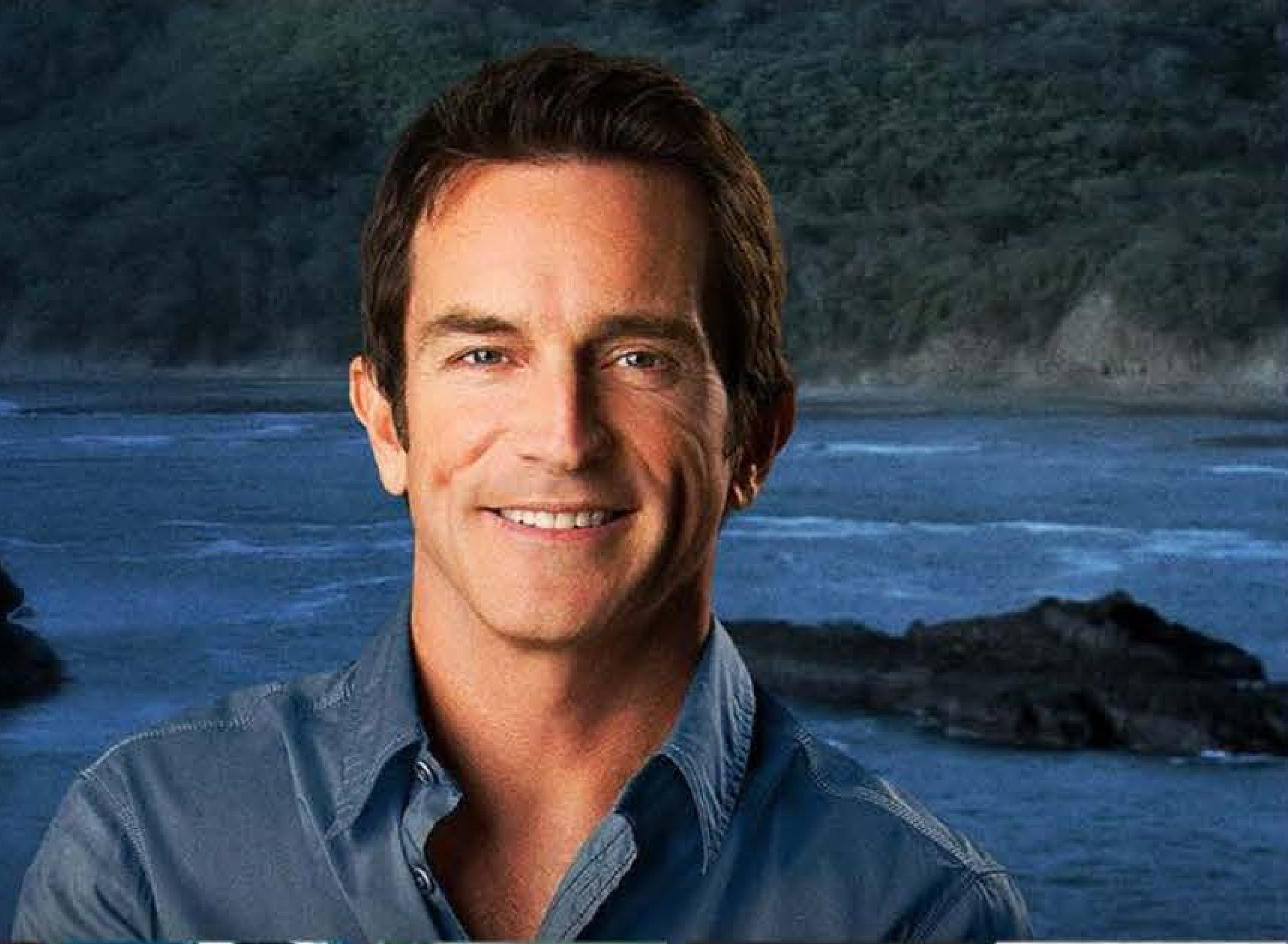

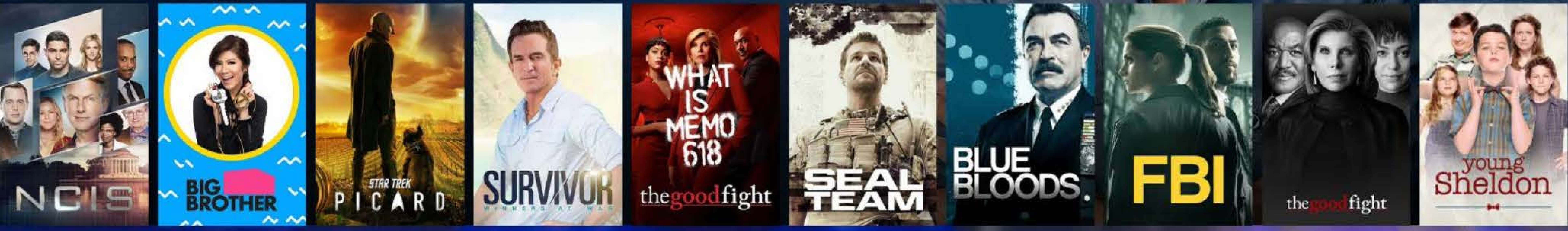
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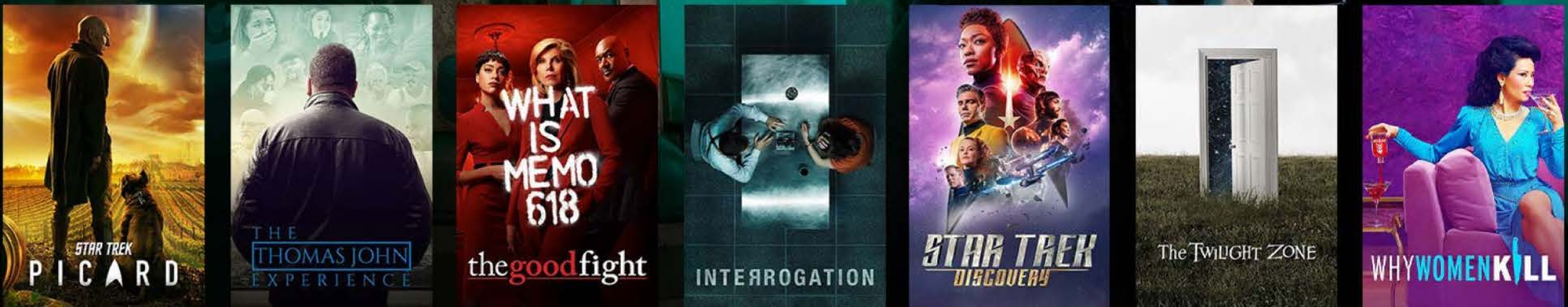
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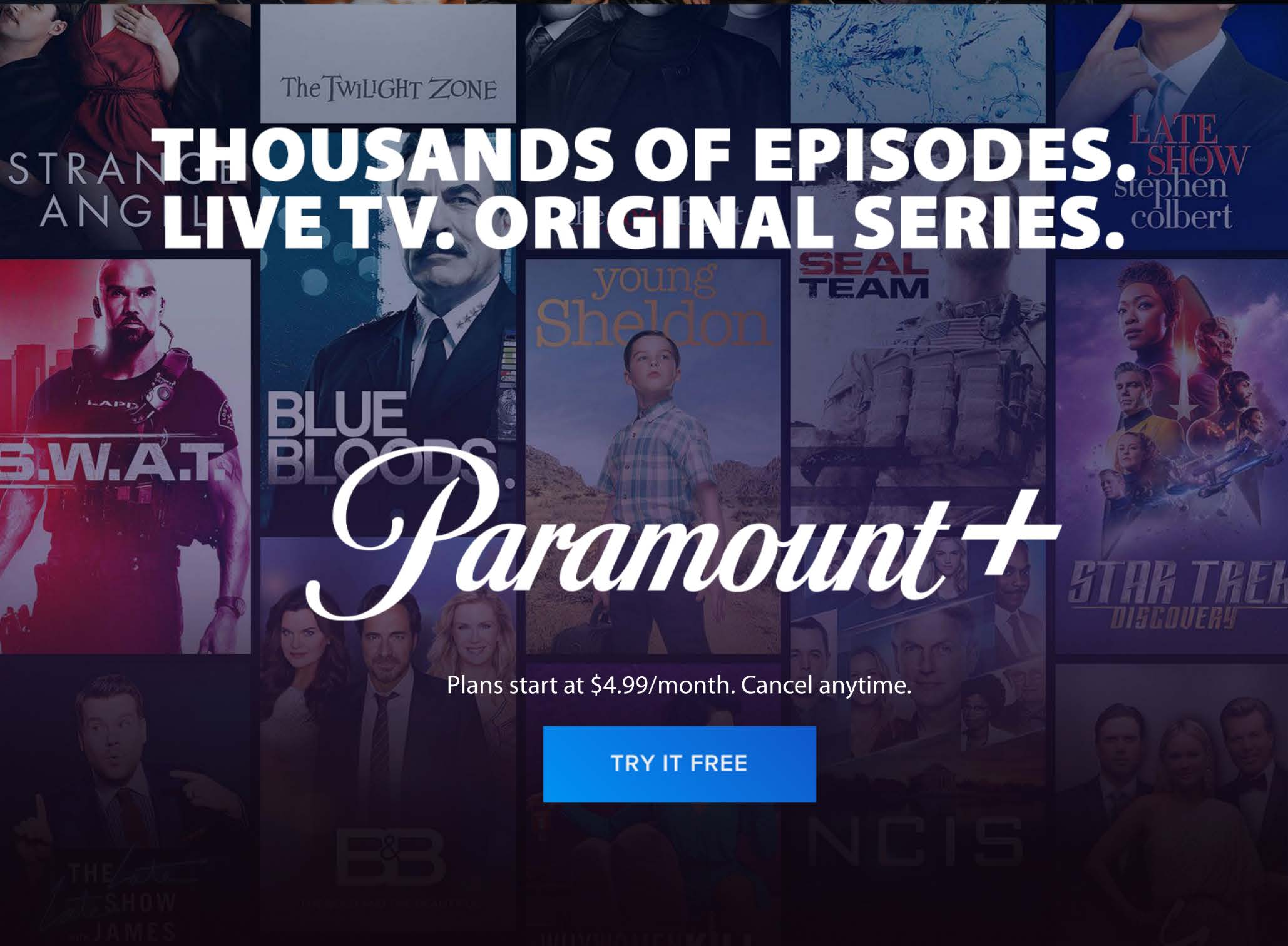
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AI USE BY BUSINESSES IS SMALL BUT GROWING RAPIDLY, LED BY IT SECTOR AND FIRMS IN COLORADO AND DC

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The rate of businesses in the U.S. using AI is still relatively small but growing rapidly, with firms in information technology, and in locations like Colorado and the District of Columbia, leading the way, according to a new paper from U.S. Census Bureau researchers.

Overall use of AI tools by firms in the production of goods and services rose from 3.7% last fall to 5.4% in February, and it is expected to rise in the U.S. to 6.6% by early fall, according to the

STRICT OF COLUMBIA COURT OF APPEALS

bureau's Business Trends and Outlook Survey released this spring.

The use of AI by firms is still rather small because many businesses haven't yet seen a need for it, Census Bureau researchers said in an accompanying paper.

"Many small businesses, such as barber shops, nail salons or dry cleaners, may not yet see a use for AI, but this can change with growing business applications of AI," they said. "One potential explanation is the current lack of AI applications to a wide variety of business problems."

Few firms utilizing AI tools reported laying off workers because of it. Instead, many businesses that use AI were expanding compared to other firms. They also were developing new work flows, training staff on the technology and purchasing related services, the researchers said.

The rate of AI use among business sectors varied widely, from 1.4% in construction and agriculture to 18.1% in information technology. Larger firms were more likely to be using the technology than small and midsize firms, but the smallest firms used it more than midsize businesses, according to the researchers.

The type of work AI was used for the most included marketing tasks, customer service chatbots, getting computers to understand human languages, text and data analytics and voice recognition.

Erik Paul, the chief operating officer of a software development company in Orlando, has been using AI tools for about a year to generate images for marketing materials, help write compliance paperwork that can

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be tedious and compare different versions of documentation for products.

“It has become an integral part of our day,” Paul said Thursday. “But the problem is, you can’t trust it. You can never blindly copy and paste. Sometimes the context gets thrown off and it throws in erroneous details that aren’t helpful or change the tone of the topic you are writing about.”

The two places with the nation’s highest AI use by firms, Colorado and the District of Columbia, had adoption rates of 7.4% and 7.2%, respectively. Not far behind those states were Florida, Delaware, California and Washington State. Mississippi had the smallest AI use with 1.7% of firms.

The survey showed some ambivalence among firms about whether they will adopt AI to their businesses in the near future or continue using it. Two-thirds of firms not yet using AI reported that they expect to remain non-users, and 14% of firms not yet using the technology were unsure if they would do so down the road.

Around 14% of current users reported that they didn’t expect to continue utilizing AI in the near future, “potentially indicating some degree of ongoing experimentation or temporary use that may result in de-adoption,” the researchers said.

The statistical agency plans to continue tracking AI use by businesses, Ron Jarmin, the Census Bureau’s deputy director, said Thursday.

“For the first time that I know of, we are in a place to measure the diffusion of a general-purpose technology through the economy to learn what impact it has,” Jarmin said.

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CONSUMER GROUPS PUSH CONGRESS TO UPHOLD AUTOMATIC REFUNDS FOR AIRLINE PASSENGERS

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Consumer groups are pushing Congress to uphold automatic refunds for airline passengers whose flights are canceled or delayed for several hours.

Just last week, the Transportation Department announced a rule requiring airlines to pay quick and automatic refunds. President Joe Biden touted the rule, posting on X this week, “It’s time airline passengers got the cash refunds they’re owed, without having to jump through hoops.”

But eight words in a 1,069-page bill that the Senate began debating Wednesday would

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keep the burden for refunds on consumers. The bill says airlines must pay refunds only "upon written or electronic request of the passenger."

Consumer advocates say travelers will lose money without automatic refunds.

"How many average air travelers know what the (refund) rules are? How many of them know how to go about filing a claim?" said William McGee, a consumer advocate at the American Economic Liberties Project, a group skeptical of large corporations, including airlines. "The percentages are so low that the airlines sit on a tremendous amount of money that is never refunded because nobody asks."

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., said the bill's wording around refunds "would be a gift to the airlines, who know many travelers won't have the time or resources to navigate the bureaucratic process they designed."

The eight words are not new. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., included them in the bill she introduced last June to reauthorize Federal Aviation Administration programs for five years, and an amendment to strip them out failed in the Senate Commerce Committee, which Cantwell chairs.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said this week that his department has good legal authority for its rule on automatic refunds. However, John Breyault, an advocate with the National Consumers League, said the language in the new bill could make it easier for airlines to block automatic refunds in court.

Airlines for America, a trade group for the largest U.S. carriers, has opposed automatic refunds from the beginning — as it opposes almost any effort to tell airlines how to conduct their business. The trade group argued that airlines should be able to offer to put a stranded traveler on a different flight or give them frequent-flyer points — and pay a refund only if the customer rejected those offers.

The trade group declined to comment.

Refunds are emerging as one of the most controversial provisions in the massive $105 billion FAA bill. A fight also is likely over a provision to allow 10 more flights per day at busy Reagan National Airport near Washington, D.C.

Consumer groups generally favor the bill, which triples maximum fines for airlines that violate consumer protections, requires airlines to let families sit together at no extra charge, and requires that airline travel vouchers be good for at least five years. It also would write into law another new rule from the Transportation Department, which defines a significant delay — one that could lead to a refund — as three hours for domestic flights and six for international flights.

They didn't get other items they wanted, however, including minimum seat sizes and more authority for the government to regulate airline schedules and fees.

The bill includes a number of safety-related measures in response to a series of close calls between planes at the nation's airports. It will allow the FAA to increase the number of air traffic controllers and safety inspectors and to equip more airports with technology designed to prevent collisions between planes on runways.

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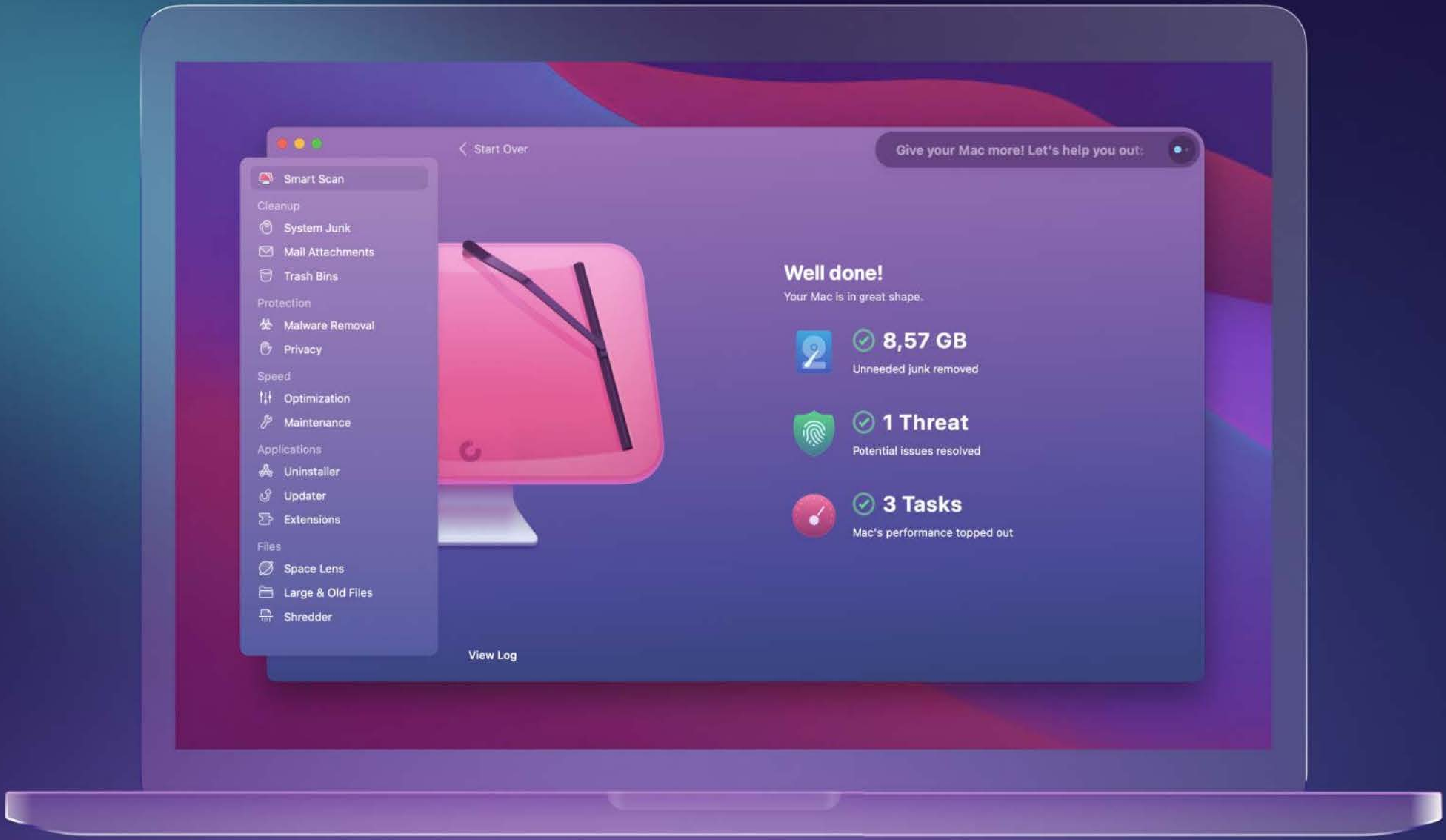
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SENATORS WANT LIMITS ON THE GOVERNMENT'S USE OF FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY FOR AIRPORT SCREENING

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A bipartisan group of senators is pushing for restrictions on the use of facial recognition technology by the Transportation Security Administration, saying they are concerned about travelers' privacy and civil liberties.

In a letter on Thursday, the group of 14 lawmakers called on Senate leaders to use the upcoming reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration as a vehicle to limit TSA's use of the technology so Congress can put in place some oversight.

"This technology poses significant threats to our privacy and civil liberties, and Congress should prohibit TSA's development and deployment of facial recognition tools until rigorous congressional oversight occurs," the senators wrote.

The effort, led by Sens. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., John Kennedy, R-La., and Roger Marshall, R-Kan., "would halt facial recognition technology at security checkpoints, which has proven to improve security effectiveness, efficiency, and the passenger experience," TSA said in a statement.

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The technology is currently in use at 84 airports around the country and is planned to expand in the coming years to the roughly 430 covered by TSA.

The FAA reauthorization is one of the last must-pass bills of this Congress. The agency regulates airlines and aircraft manufacturers and manages the nation's airspace.

TSA, which is part of the Homeland Security Department, has been rolling out the facial recognition technology at select airports in a pilot project. Travelers put their driver's license into a slot that reads the card or they place their passport photo against a card reader. Then they look at a camera on a screen about the size of an iPad that captures their image and compares it to their ID. The technology is checking to make sure that travelers at the airport match the ID they present and that the identification is real. A TSA officer signs off on the screening.

The agency says the system improves accuracy of identity verification without slowing passenger speeds at checkpoints.

Passengers can opt out, although David Pekoske, the TSA administrator, said last year that eventually biometrics would be required because they are more effective and efficient. He gave no timeline.

Critics have raised questions about how the data is collected, who has access to it, and what happens if there is a hack. Privacy advocates are concerned about possible bias in the algorithms and say it is not clear enough to passengers that they do not have to submit to facial recognition.

“It is clear that we are at a critical juncture,” the senators wrote. “The scope of the government’s use of facial recognition on Americans will expand exponentially under TSA’s plans with little to no public discourse or congressional oversight.”

Image: Romolo Tavani

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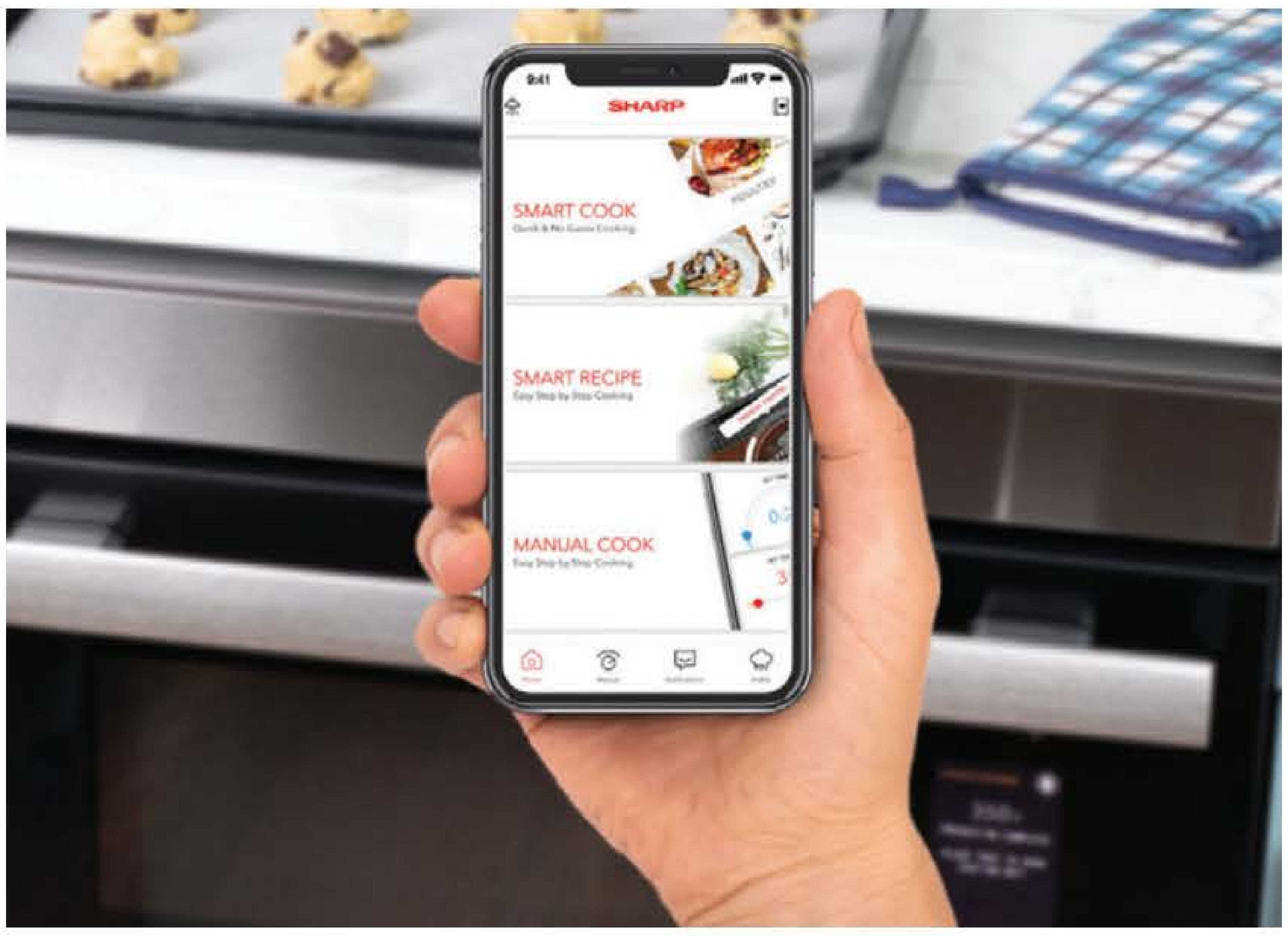

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GOOGLE & APPLE NOW THREATENED BY THE US ANTITRUST LAWS THAT HELPED BUILD THEIR TECHNOLOGY EMPIRES

The U.S. Justice Department's double-barreled antitrust attack on Google's dominant search and Apple's trendsetting iPhone is reviving memories of the epic battle that hobbled Microsoft before it roared back to yet again become the world's most valuable company.

The parallels to the Justice Department's landmark antitrust case in 1998 could provide a window into the potential breakthroughs that could be unleashed if regulators succeed in their attempts to crack down on Google and Apple.

Federal lawyers have even gone as far as to assert Google and Apple may never have created so many popular products or become as powerful as they are now if Microsoft hadn't been reined in a quarter century ago.

In closing arguments of a Washington, D.C., trial that began last September, regulators applied the finishing touches to a case alleging Google has turned its search engine into an illegal monopoly that stifles competition and innovation. The Apple case, which was only filed a month ago, is still years away from its resolution.

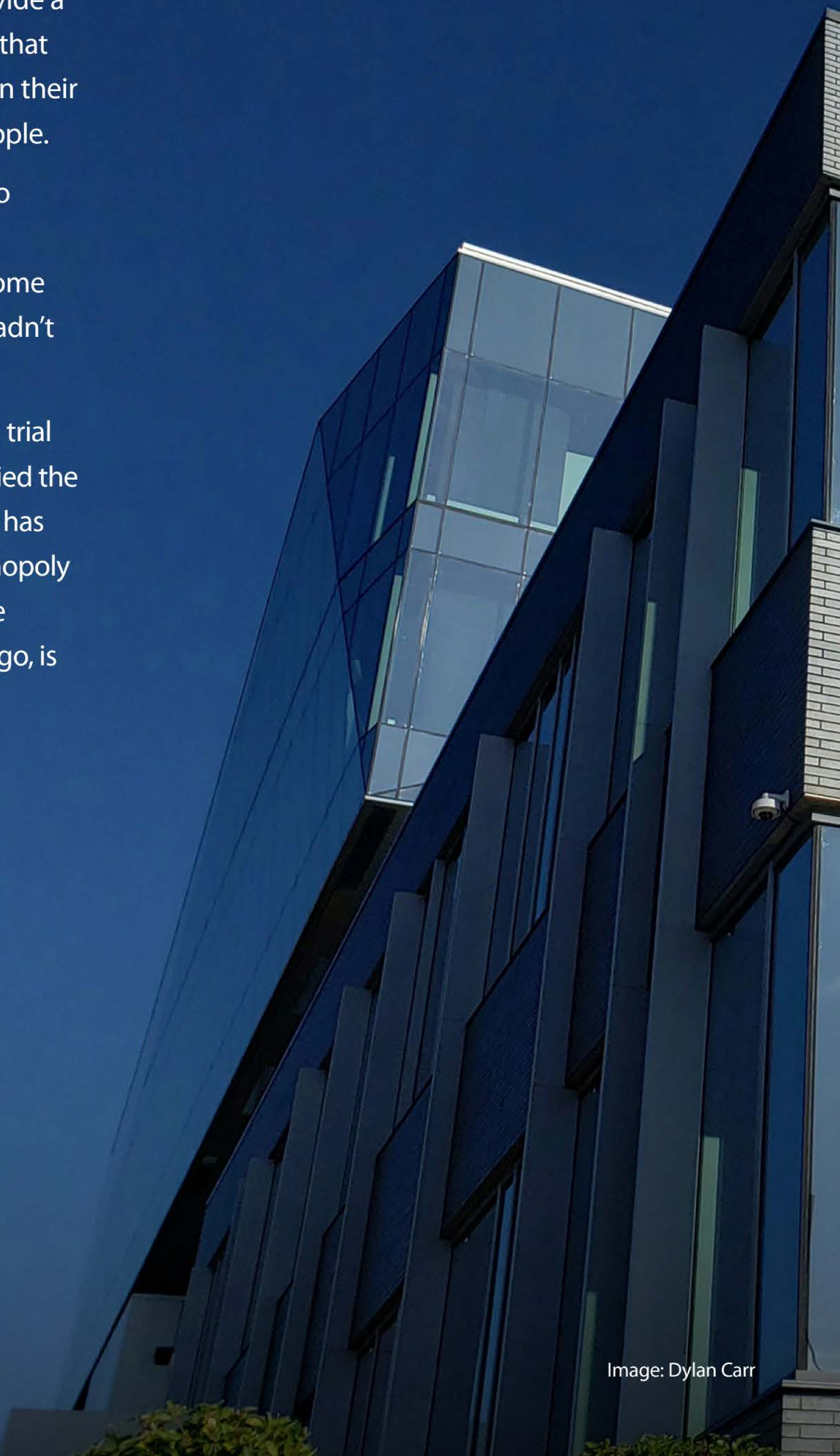

Image: Dylan Carr

Google

Image: Thai Nguyen

Although regulators have lodged separate complaints against Google and Apple, the two cases are shadowed by Microsoft's legal saga that began when both those were mere specks on the technology landscape.

When they went after Google in October 2020, regulators compared the lucrative deals that the company cut with Apple to lock its search engine into the iPhone and Safari web browser to the same tactics Microsoft deployed in its personal computer software to block competition.

And in the antitrust lawsuits that they filed against Apple last month, the Justice Department pointed back to complaints that company co-founder Steve Jobs had raised in 1998 against Microsoft's "dirty tactics" while urging regulators to take steps to force the PC software maker "to play fair."

And that is what the Justice Department did in an antitrust case against Microsoft that caused massive distractions that opened the door for Google's search engine to become the internet's main gateway. It also culminated in a series of concessions that paved the way for Apple to extend the reach of its iTunes music store that increased the popularity of the iPod that spawned the iPhone.

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Image: Carlo Allegri

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The Microsoft case "created new opportunities for innovation in areas that would become critical to the success of Apple's consumer devices and the company itself," the Justice Department crowed in the lawsuit that casts the iPhone as an illegal monopoly.

After years of mostly fruitless attempts to compete against Google's search engine and the iPhone under the leadership of Steve Ballmer, Microsoft began to regain its stride when Satya Nadella became CEO in 2014.

Earlier this year, Microsoft's market value hit $3 trillion for the first time, surpassing Apple as the world's most valuable company while taking the early lead in artificial intelligence technology that's expected to reshape the world.

It's an odd juxtaposition that has thrust regulators into battling two companies they helped create when they caged a colossus now angling to seize the mantle in technology's next frontier.

Microsoft

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crosoft

Image: Elaine Thompson

But it's also a tableau that antitrust experts cite as evidence that the system is working to unlock more robust competition that hatches innovations. And then those breakthroughs sometimes serve as the building blocks for new monopolies that must eventually be challenged by regulators, even as fallen empires like Microsoft can still find ways to reinvent themselves.

"It's not about an agenda about trying to pursue and destroy companies, it's about trying to restore competition in a market," said Rebecca Haw Allensworth, a Vanderbilt University law professor who focuses on antitrust law issues. "What has happened with the Microsoft case is a success story that can also provide a blueprint for Apple and Google when people ask why is America trying to destroy its most successful companies? Microsoft has done great after it had a major antitrust claim against it."

oogle

Image: Gonzalo Fuentes

The Justice Department's landmark case against Microsoft was not the first time an antitrust lawsuit turned into a springboard for other companies to emerge as dominant forces that eventually need to be corralled, too.

For instance, separate antitrust lawsuits filed against IBM in 1969 and AT&T in 1974 helped pave the way for Microsoft and Apple to launch the personal computer revolution that subsequently spawned the internet boom that was followed by the smartphone explosion.

Those are the kinds of innovations that have fueled economic growth and society-shifting products that might not have happened had antitrust regulators stayed on the sidelines while IBM and AT&T continued to exploit their respective monopolies, Yale University economics professor Fiona Scott Morton said.

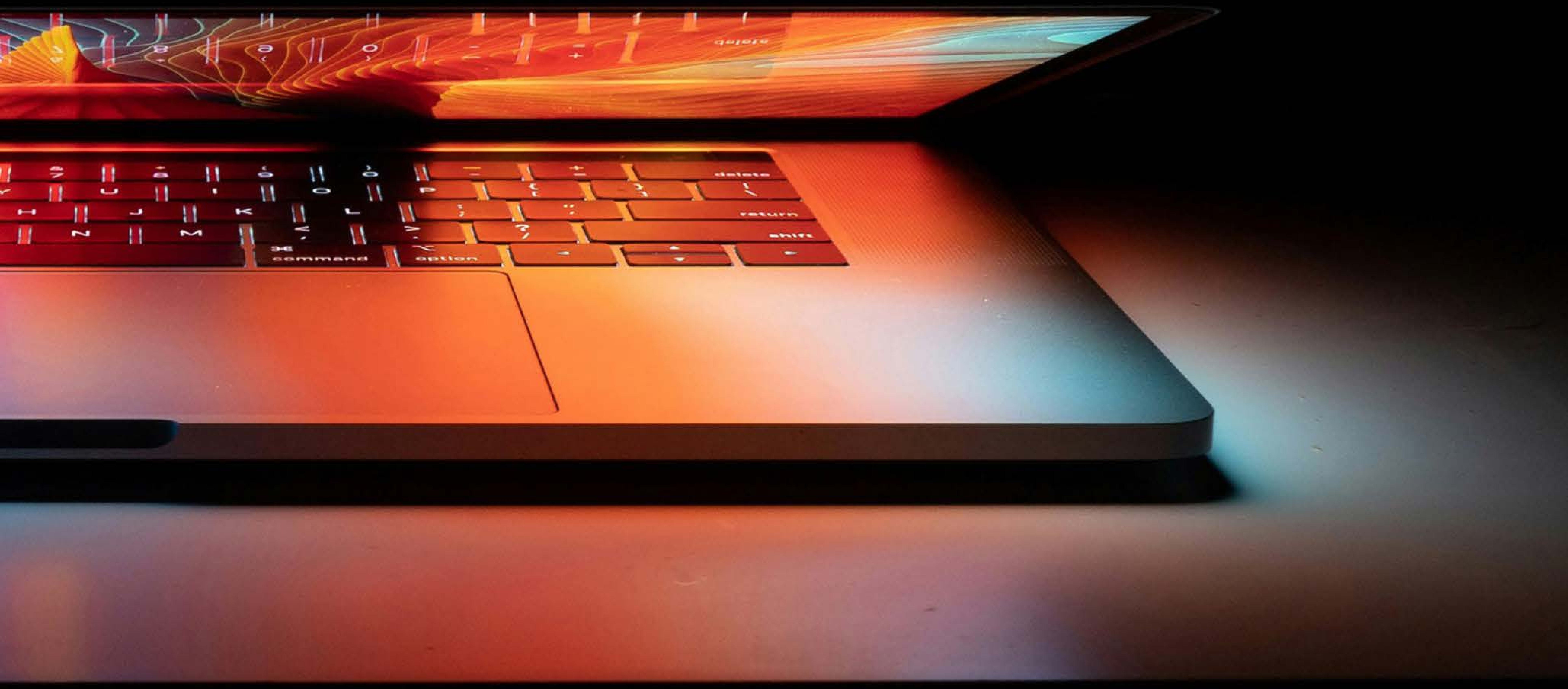
"When you innovate successfully, you can grow like crazy but then it's 20 years later and it's hard to keep growing like you were," said Scott Morton, who once was chief economist in the Justice Department's antitrust division. "So instead of just relying on innovation, you realize, 'Hey we have a lot of market power, we could use that to raise profits.'

Image: Tianyi Ma

"It's just very natural that's what happens repeatedly and regulators have to say, 'No, that part isn't allowed, you have to compete on the merits.' And oftentimes when you succeed in forcing more competition, somebody else ends up winning the next race."

After the closing arguments in the Justice Department's antitrust case against Google wrap up, U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta is expected to issue his ruling in the late summer or early autumn.

Meanwhile, the case against Apple will continue to progress in New Jersey federal court while antitrust regulators examine whether Microsoft is once again crossing the line to gain an unfair advantage in the still-nascent field of AI.



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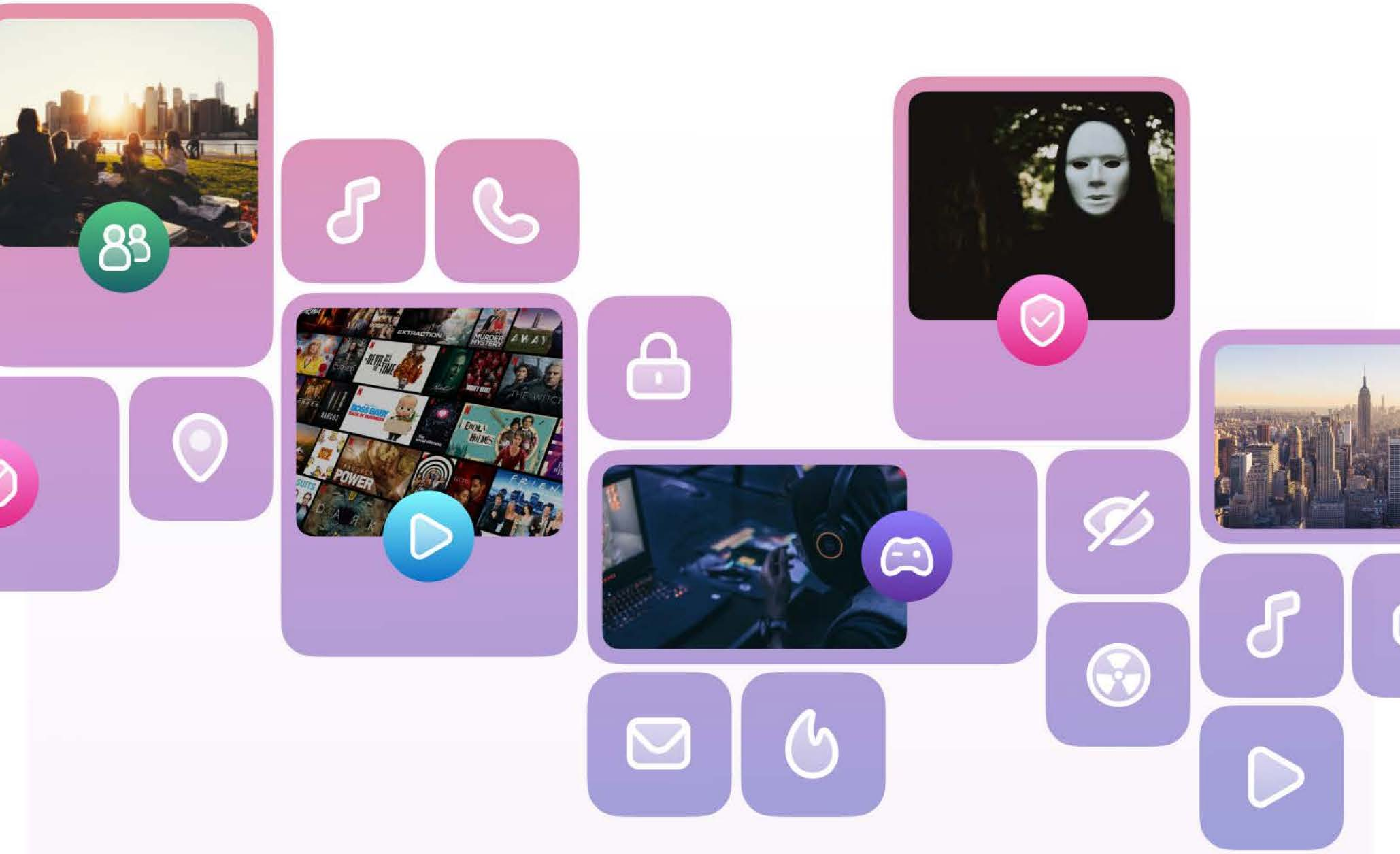

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HOW TIKTOK GREW FROM A FUN APP FOR TEENS INTO A POTENTIAL NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT

If it feels like TikTok has been around forever, that's probably because it has, at least if you're measuring via internet time. What's now in question is whether it will be around much longer and, if so, in what form?

Starting in 2017, when the Chinese social video app merged with its competitor Musical.ly, TikTok has grown from a niche teen app into a global trendsetter. While, of course, also emerging as a potential national security threat, according to U.S. officials.

TikTok

On Wednesday, President Joe Biden signed legislation requiring TikTok parent ByteDance to sell to a U.S. owner within a year or to shut down. It's not clear whether that law will survive an expected legal challenge or that ByteDance would agree to sell.

Here's how TikTok came to this juncture:

MARCH 2012

ByteDance is founded in China by entrepreneur Zhang Yimin. Its first hit product is Toutiao, a personalized news aggregator for Chinese users.

JULY 2014

Startup Musical.ly, later known for an eponymous app used to post short lipsyncing music videos, is founded in China by entrepreneur Alex Zhu.

JULY 2015

Musical.ly hits #1 in the Apple App Store, following a design change that made the company's logo visible when users shared their videos.

2016

ByteDance launches Douyin, a video sharing app for Chinese users. Its popularity inspires the company to spin off a version for foreign audiences called TikTok.

NOVEMBER 2017

ByteDance acquires Musical.ly for $1 billion. Nine months later, ByteDance merges it with TikTok.

Powered by an algorithm that encourages binge-watching, users begin to share a wide variety of video on the app, including dance moves, kitchen food preparation and various “challenges” to perform, record and post acts that range from serious to satirical.

FEBRUARY 2019

Rapper Lil Nas X releases the country-trap song “Old Town Road” on TikTok, where it goes viral and pushes the song to a record 17 weeks in the #1 spot on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. The phenomenon kicks off a wave of TikTok videos from musical artists who suddenly see TikTok as a critical way to reach fans.

TikTok settles federal charges of violating U.S. child-privacy laws and agrees to pay a $5.7 million fine.

Image: Hyungwon Kang

SEPTEMBER 2019

The Washington Post reports that while images of Hong Kong democracy protests and police crackdowns are common on most social media sites, they are strangely absent on TikTok. The same story notes that TikTok posts with the #trump2020 tag received more than 70 million views.

The company insists that TikTok content moderation, conducted in the U.S., is not responsible and says the app is a place for entertainment, not politics.

The Guardian reports on internal documents that reportedly detail how TikTok instructs its moderators to delete or limit the reach of videos touching on topics sensitive to China such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and subsequent massacre, Tibetan independence or the sanctioned religious group Falun Gong.

OCTOBER 2019

U.S. politicians begin to raise alarms about TikTok's influence, calling for a federal investigations of its Musical.ly acquisition and a national security probe into TikTok and other Chinese-owned apps. That investigation begins in November, according to news reports.

TikTok

DECEMBER 2019

The Pentagon recommends that all U.S. military personnel delete TikTok from all phones, personal and government-issued. Some services ban the app on military owned phones. In January, the Pentagon bans the app from all military phones.

TikTok becomes the second-most downloaded app in the world, according to data from analytics firm SensorTower.

MAY 2020

Privacy groups file a complaint alleging TikTok is still violating U.S. child-protection laws and flouting a 2019 settlement agreement. The company "takes the issue of safely seriously" and continues to improve safeguards, it says.

TikTok hires former Disney executive Kevin Mayer as its chief executive officer in an apparent attempt to improve its U.S. relations. Mayer resigns three months later.

JULY 2020

India bans TikTok and dozens of other Chinese apps in response to a border clash with China.

President Donald Trump says he is considering banning TikTok as retaliation for China's alleged mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Image: Manjunath Kiran

AUGUST 2020

Trump issues a sweeping but vague executive order banning American companies from any "transaction" with ByteDance and its subsidiaries, including TikTok. Several days later, he issues a second order demanding that ByteDance divest itself of TikTok's U.S. operations within 90 days.

Microsoft confirms it is exploring acquisition of TikTok. The deal never materializes; neither does a similar overture from Oracle and Walmart. TikTok, meanwhile, sues the Trump administration for alleged violation of due process in its executive orders.

NOVEMBER 2020

Joe Biden is elected president. He doesn't offer new policy on TikTok and won't take office until January, but Trump's plans to force a sale of TikTok start to unravel anyway. The Trump administration extends the deadlines it had imposed on ByteDance and TikTok and eventually lets them slide altogether.

Image: Aly Song

TikTok

FEBRUARY 2021

Newly sworn-in President Joe Biden postpones the legal cases involving Trump's plan to ban TikTok, effectively bringing them to a halt.

SEPTEMBER 2021

TikTok announces it has more than a billion monthly active users.

DECEMBER 2021

A Wall Street Journal report finds TikTok algorithms can flood teens with a torrent of harmful material such as videos recommending extreme dieting, a form of eating disorder.

FEBRUARY 2022

TikTok announces new rules to deter the spread of harmful material such as viral hoaxes and promotion of eating disorders.

APRIL 2022

"The Unofficial Bridgerton Musical," a project created by two fans of the Netflix show as a TikTok project, wins the Grammy for Best Musical Theater Album.

TikTok becomes the most downloaded app in the world, beating out Instagram, according to SensorTower data.

JUNE 2022

BuzzFeed reports that China-based ByteDance employees have repeatedly accessed the nonpublic information of TikTok users, based on leaked recordings from more than 80 internal TikTok meetings. TikTok responds with a vague comment touting its commitment to security that doesn't directly address the BuzzFeed report.

TikTok also announces it has migrated its user data to U.S. servers managed by the U.S. tech firm Oracle. But that doesn't prevent fresh alarm among U.S. officials about the risk of Chinese authorities accessing U.S. user data.

DECEMBER 2022

FBI Director Chris Wrap raises national security concerns about TikTok, warning that Chinese officials could manipulate the app's recommendation algorithm for influence operations.

ByteDance also said it fired four employees who accessed data on journalists from Buzzfeed News and The Financial Times while attempting to track down leaks of confidential materials about the company.

FEBRUARY 2023

The White House gives federal agencies 30 days to ensure TikTok is deleted from all government-issued mobile devices. Both the FBI and the Federal Communications Commission warn that ByteDance could share TikTok user data with China's authoritarian government.

MARCH 2023

Legislators grill TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew at a six-hour congressional hearing where Chew, a native of Singapore, attempts to push back on assertions that TikTok and ByteDance are tools of the Chinese government.

Tik Tok
Byt

eDance
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JANUARY 2024

TIKTOK said it was restricting a tool some researchers use to analyze popular videos on the platform.

MARCH 2024

A bill to ban TikTok or force its sale to a U.S. company gathers steam in Congress. TikTok brings dozens of its creators to Washington to tell lawmakers to back off, while emphasizing changes the company has made to protect user data. TikTok also annoys legislators by sending notifications to users urging them to "speak up now" or risk seeing TikTok banned; users then flood congressional offices with calls.

The House of Representatives passes the TikTok ban-or-sell bill.

APRIL 2024

The Senate follows suit, sending the bill to President Biden, who signs it.

Image: Jonathan Ernst

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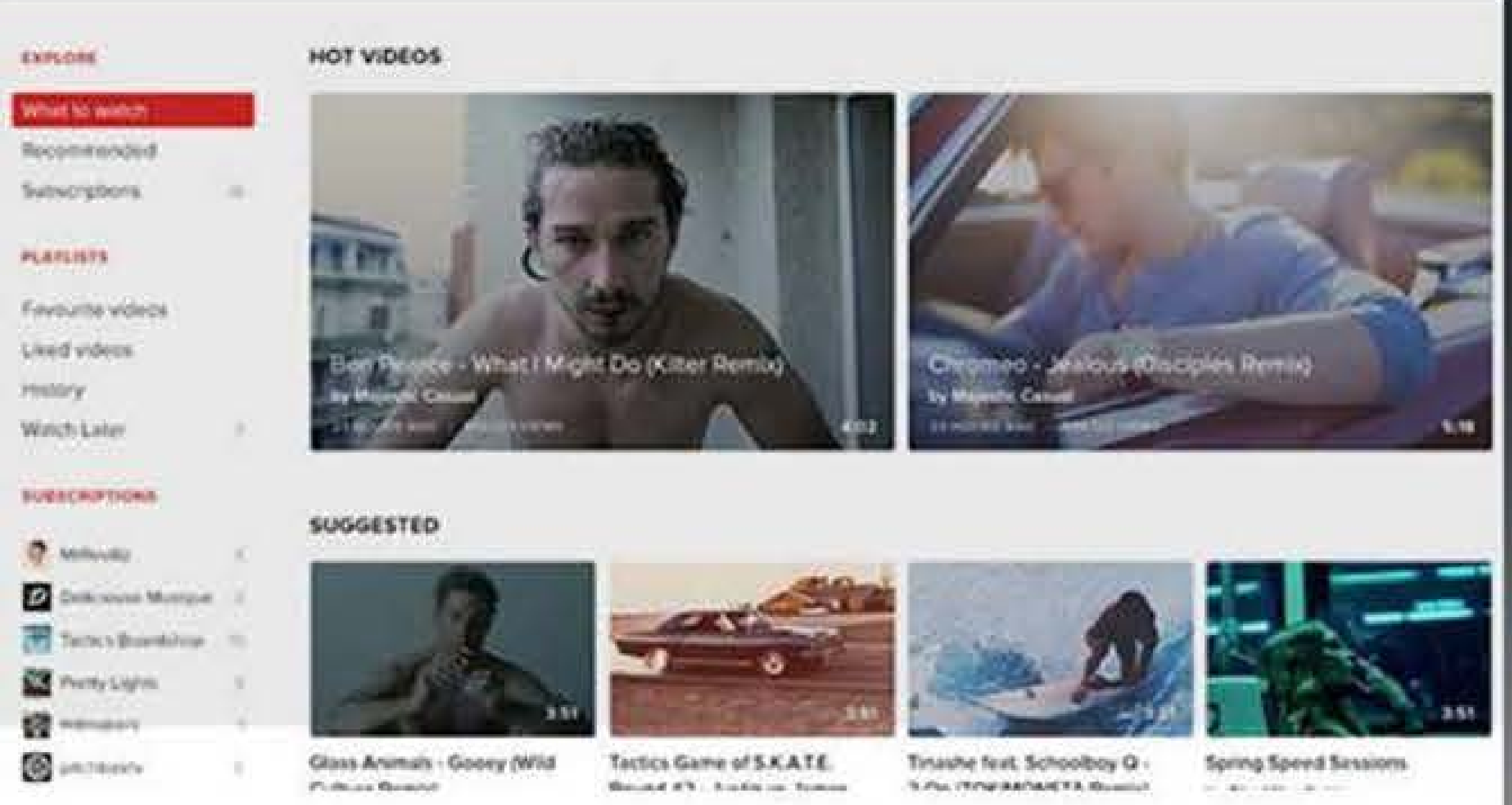
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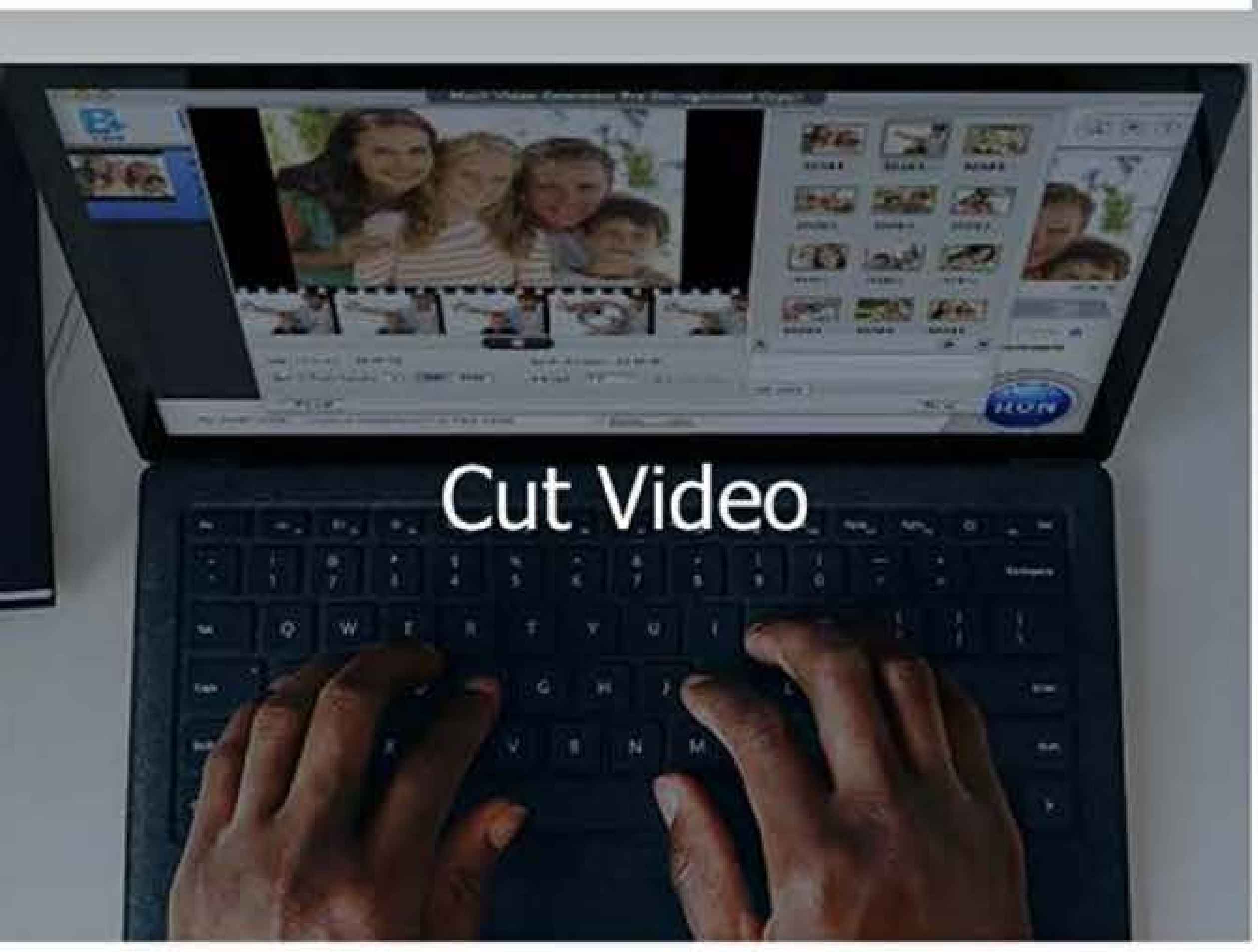

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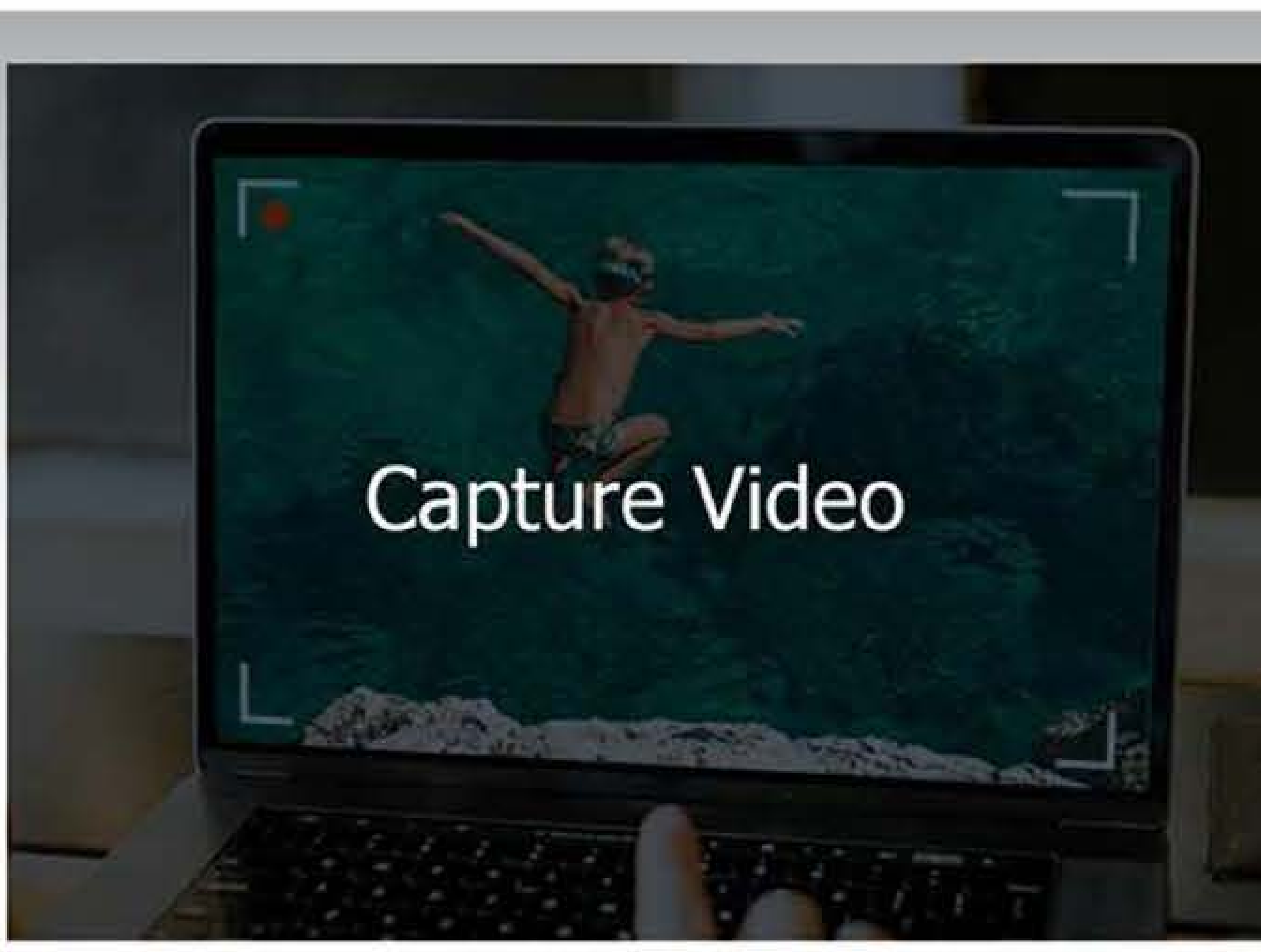

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home

THE SILENT BATTLE TO SHAPE THE LIVING SPACES OF TOMORROW

The race to redefine modern home smart tech is underway, and industry giants like Apple are leading the charge. After discontinuing its ambitious Project Titan, the Cupertino company has refocused its efforts on transforming homes into intelligent hubs of connectivity.

HOME OF THE FUTURE

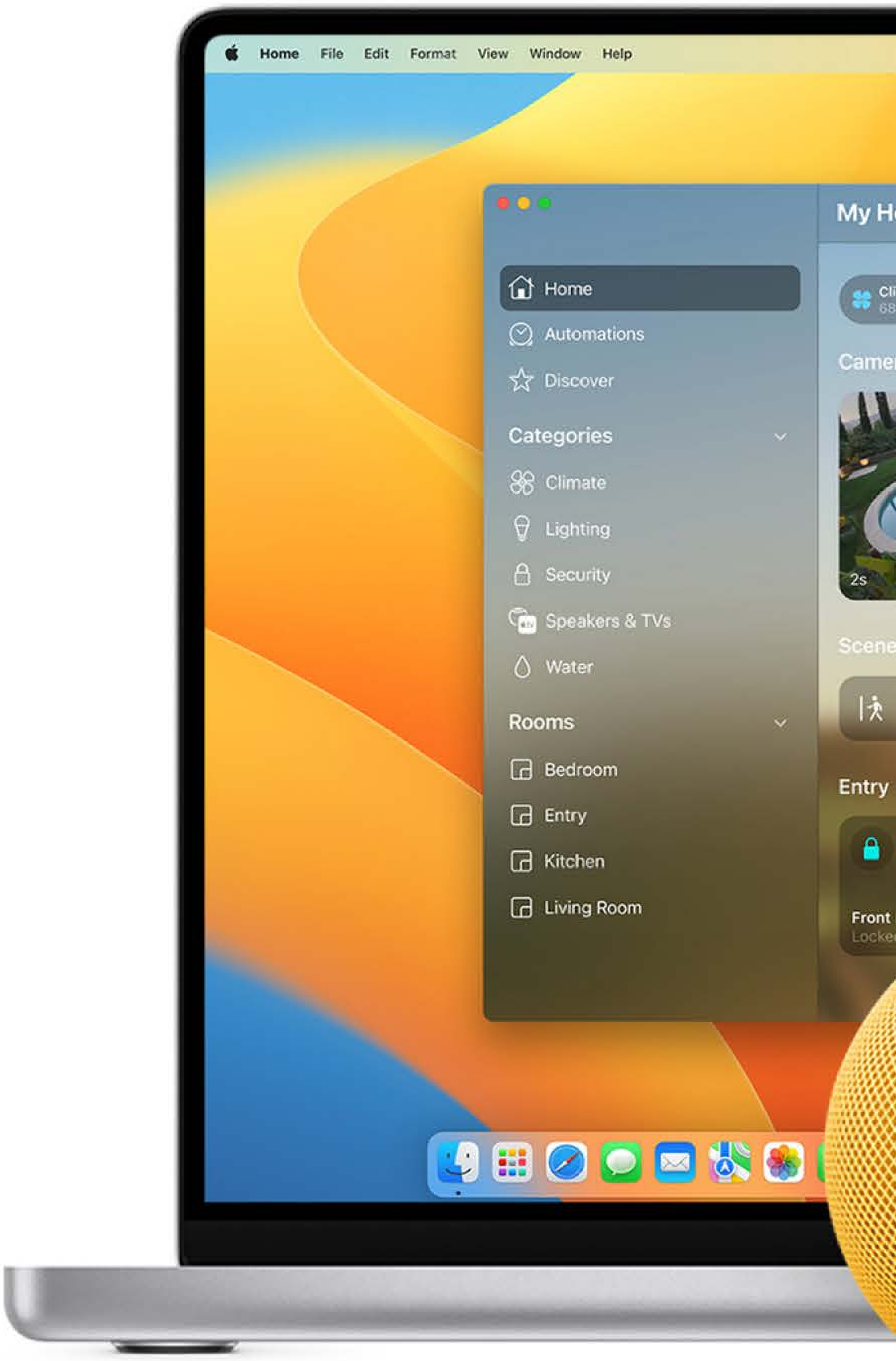
Apple is at the forefront of home technology with its robust portfolio of devices like Apple TV and HomePod. These tools enhance entertainment experiences and integrate seamlessly with other smart devices, creating a cohesive ecosystem within the home. And with the **advent of new AI-driven projects, Apple aims to push these boundaries further.** In secretive labs, Apple engineers are reportedly developing advanced projects to elevate the smart home experience. These innovations are expected to harness the power of AI to make the home—and indeed, the home office—more intuitive and interconnected. The goal is to craft environments that respond to the user's commands and anticipate their needs, learning from daily routines to optimise functionality and comfort.

The implications of Apple's new direction are vast. By enhancing its AI capabilities, Apple is not just selling a product but an experience—a more innovative, efficient way of living. This move will likely set new standards in the home technology industry, prompting competitors to innovate or risk obsolescence. And HomePod could be at the heart of it.

HOMEPOD INNOVATIONS

Apple's vision for the HomePod is much more than a $99 smart speaker - the company wants to release a new model with an LCD. A new version of the HomePod topped with a large curved glass display could be coming soon, **according to leaks and prototypes** with a new screen covering almost the entire top surface of the device. This starkly differs from the current HomePod, which features a flat touch surface with LEDs for visual feedback. The new design aligns with earlier leaks that hinted at a curved LCD, suggesting a more interactive and informative user experience. Rumours have been circulating about Apple's plans to integrate displays into its HomePod series, with comparisons drawn to devices like the Amazon Echo Show. According to sources like 9to5Mac, the display could show details such as media information from Apple Music or Apple Podcasts and even allow users to handle notifications for calls and messages through the HomePod.

Further intrigue is added by discoveries within the tvOS 17.4 code, which support the existence of an advanced prototype sporting a display as large as that of an iPad mini 6. Despite these exciting prospects, noted analyst Mark Gurman of Bloomberg has tempered expectations, **suggesting a 2024 launch might be off the cards.**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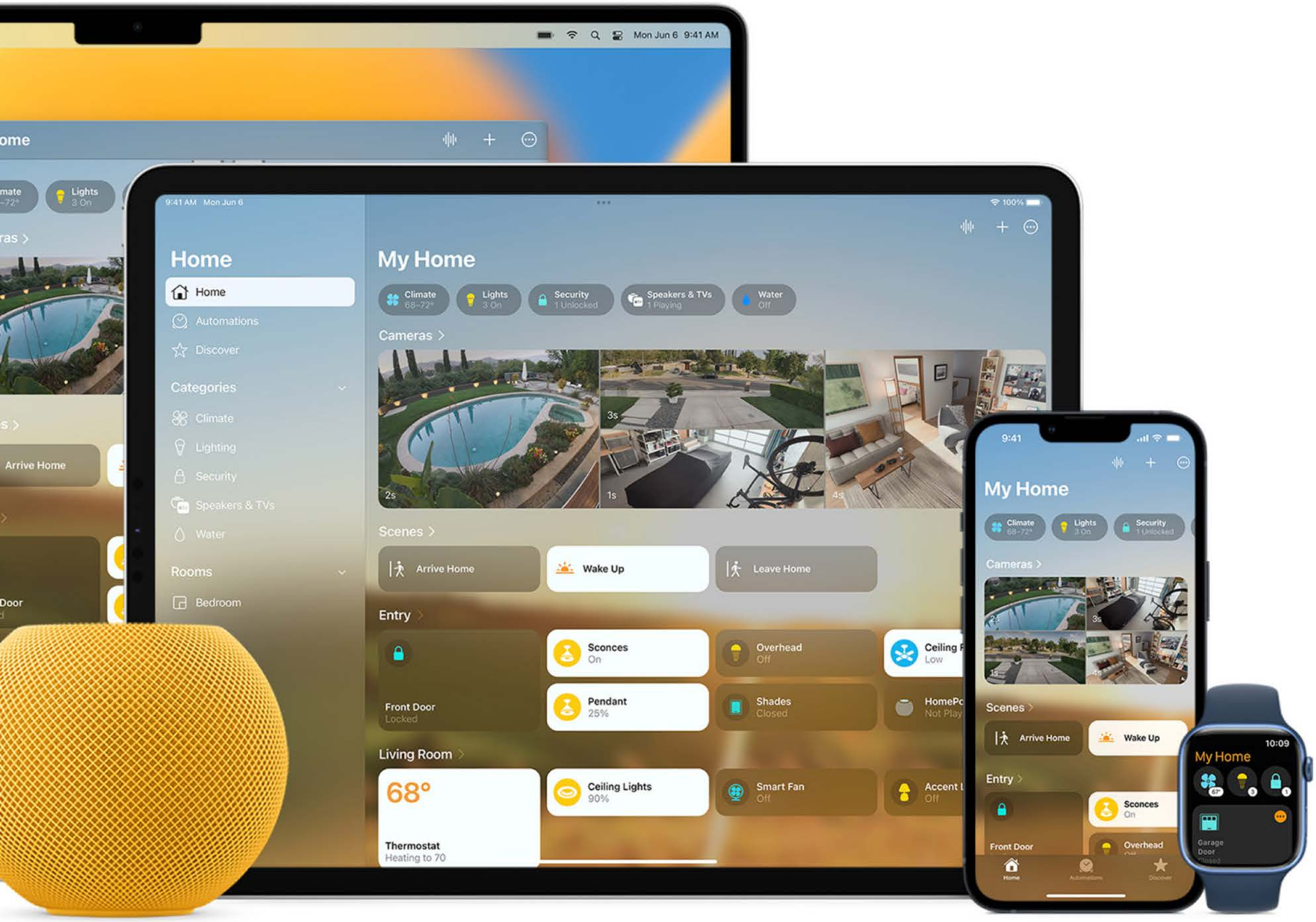
MAKING APPLE TV THE HUB OF THE HOME

Another smart home innovation reportedly in the works is a new Apple TV box featuring a built-in camera for enhanced interactivity. Bloomberg's Mark Gurman hinted at this advancement, suggesting a leap forward in how users engage with their television sets. Including a built-in camera would be a significant upgrade, allowing for video calls directly from the TV. This development would align with the **recent addition of a FaceTime app to tvOS 17** which currently requires a connected iPhone or iPad to function. A built-in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Water Off
Cameras
Scenes
Arrive Home
Wake Up
Leave Home
Entry
Sconces On
Overhead Off
Front Door Locked
Pendant 25%
Shades Closed
Living Room
68°
Thermostat Heating to 70
Ceiling Lights 90%
Smart Fan Off
9:41
10:09
My Home
Garage Door

camera would streamline this process, allowing users to make video calls effortlessly without needing to sync with other devices. Gurman’s insights into the future capabilities of Apple TV indicate the introduction of “gesture-based controls.” Although specifics remain sparse, these controls could allow users to interact with their TV using simple hand gestures. Such an innovation could expand beyond controlling video calls to include general navigation and interaction with other TV apps, potentially incorporating 3D effects like those seen in iOS 17 and macOS Sonoma updates.

AN APPLE ROBOT

In a pivot from its automotive ambitions, **Apple is reportedly considering the development of personal robots.** Allowing the news that the company was to discontinue its electric vehicle project, it’s thought that shifting focus towards a domain that promises to revolutionise everyday home life could make sense. Apple’s foray into robotics is still in its early stages, and it remains uncertain whether these robots will progress beyond the prototype phase. However, the idea that these **machines could someday roam around your home,** assisting with daily tasks and enhancing connectivity, positions Apple at the cutting edge of home technology.

The envisioned robots aren’t just about mobility. Apple is purportedly exploring an advanced tabletop device that could autonomously move its display around, catering to the user’s viewing needs. Although repeatedly shelved and resurrected in strategic discussions, this concept hints at Apple’s ambition to create a versatile, interactive home environment. Apple’s

slow but **steady approach to integrating artificial intelligence** into its products suggests that any potential robot would be highly sophisticated. The company could leverage its AI advancements to improve the functionality of these robots and ensure they seamlessly integrate with other Apple services and devices. The competition in the home robot market is already heating up, with products like **Amazon's Astro robot,** which can perform functions ranging from delivering snacks to patrolling homes. Apple's robots, however, are speculated to include even more advanced capabilities, such as managing video calls autonomously and potentially performing household chores like washing dishes.

Although Apple has not confirmed these developments, the impact of such technology could be significant, transforming how users interact with their living spaces. If Apple does proceed with this ambitious project, it could take years before these robots become a common sight in homes, but their potential to redefine domestic life is immense.

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HOMEKIT INNOVATIONS

Apple might be on a mission to become the number one player in smart home technology. Still, it can't do it without third-party manufacturers to create accessories to sit atop its ecosystem. CES 2024 has once again set the stage for the latest innovations in smart home technology, with many new HomeKit-compatible devices and services making their debut. Aqara, for example, introduced a suite of new devices, including the **Thread border router-enabled smart plug and the innovative Smart Lock U300.** Highlighting their launch is the Aqara M3 hub, coupled with Copilot, an AI-driven application designed to streamline home automation and improve user interaction with smart devices. Roborock also unveiled its latest robot vacuums, the **S8 Max Ultra and S8 Ultra,** both featuring support for Matter and Apple Home. These flagship models are engineered to offer superior cleaning with enhanced smart home integration, allowing for seamless operation via Apple's ecosystem.

Lockly introduced the Visage, a new smart lock with integrated Wi-Fi, marking its first venture into compatibility with Apple Home and HomeKey. The Visage also promises future Matter support, indicating a commitment to versatile, cross-platform usability. Nanoleaf continues to push the boundaries of bright lighting with the introduction of new Matter-compatible products, including the **Essentials Matter Smart Multicolour Lightstrip** and innovative outdoor lighting solutions. Their new Orchestrator software is set to enhance these lighting experiences, creating dynamic, customizable environments. Atom, the creators

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2 accessories

Homey Pro

of Homey Pro, announced a significant software update that activates the built-in Thread radio. This update extends Thread Border Router support and enhances integration with HomeKit, reinforcing the hub's position as a central component of the smart home ecosystem. **Ecovacs introduced the Deebot X2 Combo,** an advanced cleaning robot with a cordless vacuum attachment. This model is Matter-ready and supports integration with Apple Home, showcasing a step forward in automated home cleaning technology. As CES 2024 highlights, the smart home industry continues to evolve, with Apple HomeKit playing a crucial role in the development of connected home ecosystems.

As the boundaries of technology continue to expand, Apple's exploration into robotics underscores the company's commitment to innovation and its desire to remain at the forefront of the tech industry's evolution into new and uncharted territories.

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US TO REQUIRE AUTOMATIC EMERGENCY BRAKING ON NEW VEHICLES IN 5 YEARS AND SET PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

ACCORD
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In the not-too-distant future, automatic emergency braking will have to come standard on all new passenger vehicles in the United States, a requirement that the government says will save hundreds of lives and prevent thousands of injuries every year.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration unveiled the final version of the new regulation this week and called it the most significant safety rule in the past two decades. It's designed to prevent many rear-end and pedestrian collisions and reduce the roughly 40,000 traffic deaths that happen each year.

"We're living through a crisis in roadway deaths," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in an interview. "So we need to do something about it."

It's the U.S. government's first attempt to regulate automated driving functions and is likely to help curb some of the problems that have surfaced with driver-assist and fully automated driving systems.

Although about 90% of new vehicles have the automatic braking standard now under a voluntary agreement with automakers, at present there are no performance requirements, so some systems are may not be that effective. The new regulations set standards for vehicles to automatically stop and avoid hitting other vehicles or pedestrians, even at night.

"Part of how I think we're going to turn the corner on the unacceptable level of roadway deaths that we just lived with for my entire lifetime is through these kinds of technologies," said Buttigieg, who is 42. "We need to make sure we set high performance standards."

The regulation, which will require additional engineering to bolster software and possibly add hardware such as radar, won't go into effect for more than five years. That will give automakers time to bolster their systems during the normal model update cycle, NHTSA said.

It also will drive up prices, which NHTSA estimates at $354 million per year in 2020 dollars, or $82 per vehicle. But Buttigieg said it will save 362 lives per year, prevent about 24,000 injuries and save billions in property damage.

Critics say the standards should have come sooner, and that they don't appear to require that the systems spot people on bicycles, scooters or other vulnerable people.

The new rule requires all passenger vehicles weighing 10,000 pounds (4,500 kilograms) or less to have forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking and pedestrian detection braking.

The standards require vehicles to stop and avoid hitting a vehicle in front of them at speeds up to 62 miles per hour (100 kilometers per hour). Also they must apply the brakes automatically at up to 90 mph (145 kph) if a collision with vehicle ahead is imminent.

The systems also have to spot pedestrians during the day and night, and must stop and avoid a pedestrian at 31 mph to 40 mph (50 kph to 64 kph) depending on the pedestrian's location and movement.

The agency said that in 2019, nearly 2.2 million rear-end crashes were reported to police nationwide, killing 1,798 people and injuring 574,000 others. Sixty percent of fatal rear-end

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crashes and 73% of injury crashes were on roads with speed limits of 60 mph (97 kph) or below.

In addition, there were 6,272 pedestrians killed in crashes, with 65% of those people being hit by the front of a passenger vehicle.

The vast majority of deaths, injuries and property damage happens at speeds above 25 mph (40 kph), speeds that are not covered by the voluntary agreement, the agency said.

"Only regulation can ensure that all vehicles are equipped with AEB (automatic emergency braking) that meet minimum performance requirements," the regulation says.

NHTSA would conduct random tests to determine whether automakers are meeting the standards.

The agency said it isn't requiring what type of sensors each automaker must have to meet the requirements. That's up to the automakers. But in testing of 17 vehicles, only one — a 2023 Toyota Corolla equipped with cameras and radar — met the standards.

The regulation said radar would have to be added to about 5% of the systems in order to comply with the requirements.

Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, said the new standards will make it clear to car buyers that AEB will work properly. Most consumers, she said, are unaware that there are no requirements in place now.

"By and large, it's better to have AEB than not have AEB," she said. "So once the AEB rule is put into place, once again the federal government will be doing its job and protecting consumers."

NHTSA said it changed its original proposal, giving automakers more than five years to meet the standards instead of three. Chase said shorter would be better.

"The shorter the timeline, the more people are going to be saved, the quicker these are going to get into cars and our roadways are going to be safer for everyone," she said.

Chase said she is not pleased that the rule does not appear to include standards for bicyclists or people using scooters.

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'SHARDLAKE' IS A TUDOR-ERA MYSTERY SERIES. IT'S ALSO A WIN FOR DISABLED CHARACTERS, ITS STAR SAYS

Matthew Shardlake steps out of the pages of the late C.J. Sansom's popular historical mystery novels and into a new show, bringing with him disability representation.

"We don't see a lot of leading disabled characters," says Arthur Hughes, who plays the title character. "Well, we might, but they might not be played by disabled actors."

Shardlake is a clever lawyer who solves puzzles and problems during the reign of King Henry VIII. He is also disabled. The character is referred to as a "hunchback" by a rude rival in the books — an example of the attitude of the Tudor period, with no allowance or acceptance of differences.

"I really hope the disabled audience can see that and see maybe some of the parallels with the world we live in today. And also just to show that that a disabled actor can play a leading part," says Hughes, who was born with radial dysplasia.

Joining him in the show are Anthony Boyle, as codpiece-wearing rogue Jack Barak, and Sean Bean portraying Thomas Cromwell, the notorious and real-life political player who sends Shardlake on a mission to solve a murder at a monastery. The show airs Wednesday on Disney+ in the U.K. and Hulu in the U.S.

Shardlake | Official Trailer | Hulu

The cast spoke about the importance of casting, the comfort of a codpiece and coldness of old castles. The interview was conducted before Sansom's death Saturday at 71. Answers have been edited for brevity and clarity.

Q: SO WHO READ THE BOOKS?

BEAN: I read the first three but a long time ago. Forty years or so.

Q: WAS THE APPEAL THAT YOU ALREADY KNEW THIS WORLD?

BEAN: Yes, when I found out it was based on C.J. Sansom's books, I thought, I've read those, you know. It was something I really wanted to be involved with and when I was offered the role of Cromwell, (I was) delighted.

Q: SHARDLAKE HIMSELF, HE'S A GREAT ROLE.

HUGHES: It was a really, really enjoyable role. He's a complicated guy. Kind of strong but vulnerable and compromised in many ways within himself, within the job he's got. But I think, ultimately, a really good, just man. And a great story to go through and an interesting world to navigate. It was a lot of fun. We had a ball.

Q: HE'S ALSO A VERY COOL CHARACTER.

HUGHES: Yeah, I found reading the books, he's a very interesting character, but there's something a little weak and afraid and meek in him and actually, I wanted him to be stronger and stoic. Still vulnerable and lonely and isolated and maybe somewhat awkward, but I wanted him to have a kind of inner strength. This is a disabled man navigating a really difficult world for him and I think he'll need that kind of inner strength burning inside him.

Q: CODPIECE.

BOYLE: Yes, let's talk about it. It's something.

Q: WAS IT COMFORTABLE?

BOYLE: I sort of had to go to myself — this is the leather jacket of the era. It was like getting your codpiece on and going out, like, this looks all right. Once I got over that hurdle, I loved it and I actually felt a bit naked without it. So I did take one from set. It's in the wardrobe. I'm hoping if the show does well, people will watch it and it will be the new sort of fashion statement this summer. You know, everyone's knocking about with codpieces.

Q: YOU'VE BEEN JUMPING AROUND HISTORICAL PERIODS QUITE A LOT RECENTLY...

BOYLE: Someone said to me, I've done so many period dramas, it looks like I've got a face that just can't comprehend the internet. And they just keep putting me in these sort of random period dramas because I look like I don't know how to work Deliveroo.

HUGHES: That's brilliant.

Q: THOMAS CROMWELL IS A REALLY INTERESTING HISTORICAL FIGURE — WHAT WAS YOUR TAKE ON HIM?

BEAN: I'm not sure I quite liked him, but I admired his resolute character. He's very headstrong and very, very sure about himself, about what he was doing. But he obviously takes a lot of pleasure

in the dissolution of the monasteries and the robbing and everything that goes on changing the religion completely, to accommodate Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn. And he sees Shardlake, he knows he's a very intelligent, very gifted man and it's an interesting relationship that we have.

Q: THERE WAS TALK ABOUT DOING SOMETHING WITH THIS BEFORE, BUT WITH AN ABLE BODIED ACTOR. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR YOU THAT SHARDLAKE IS REPRESENTED PROPERLY?

HUGHES: I think having those leading roles, especially in this Tudor world that Shardlake lives in, which is built in ableism every day, but which is backed up by God and by everything that everyone's taught. And also to show that that a disabled actor can play a leading part. And he's written as a disabled man and even some of the smallest things about growing up a bit different, looking different — Shardlake will feel all those things and I've felt those things. Maybe I don't have to kind of manufacture that so much.

Q: WHAT WAS IT LIKE FILMING THE 16TH CENTURY? IT LOOKS REALLY COLD.

BOYLE: It was very cold. We were up there in freezing Budapest and I was wearing tights and a codpiece. All I can remember from the whole shoot, how cold it was. I remember riding horses, which was a laugh. We had a good fun on those didn't we?

HUGHES: We did.

BOYLE: It was a good craic. Riding into Scarnsea on the back of these horses. The sets were amazing. It really did make you feel like you were in that time period. Looking round you didn't really have to act that much because it was 360. We were on set. We were in the muck. We filmed these amazing locations, these castles and monasteries. And you didn't have to do much thinking, you were just in it.

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TESLA'S STOCK LEAPS ON REPORTS OF CHINESE APPROVAL FOR THE COMPANY'S DRIVING SOFTWARE

Image: Tyrone Siu

TESLA

Shares of Tesla stock rallied this week after the electric vehicle maker's CEO, Elon Musk, paid a surprise visit to Beijing over the weekend and reportedly won tentative approval for its driving software.

Musk met with a senior government official in the Chinese capital last Sunday, just as the nation's carmakers are showing off their latest electric vehicle models at the Beijing auto show.

According to The Wall Street Journal, which cited anonymous sources familiar with the matter, Chinese officials told Tesla that Beijing has tentatively approved the automaker's plan to launch its "Full Self-Driving," or FSD, software feature in the country.

Although it's called FSD, the software still requires human supervision. Last week the U.S. government's auto safety agency said it is investigating whether last year's recall of Tesla's Autopilot driving system did enough to make sure drivers pay attention to the road. Tesla has reported 20 more crashes involving Autopilot since the recall, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Image: Lucy Nicholson

Shares in Tesla Inc., which is based in Austin, Texas, surged to more than 15% — its biggest one-day jump since February 2020. For the year to date, shares are still down 22%.

Tesla has been contending with its stock slide and slowing production. Last week, the company said its first-quarter net income plunged by more than half, but it touted a newer, cheaper car and a fully autonomous robotaxi as catalysts for future growth.

Wedbush analyst Dan Ives called the news about the Chinese approval a "home run" for Tesla and maintained his "Outperform" rating on the stock.

"We note Tesla has stored all data collected by its Chinese fleet in Shanghai since 2021 as required by regulators in Beijing," Ives wrote in a note to investors. "If Musk is able to obtain approval from Beijing to transfer data collected in China abroad this would be pivotal around the acceleration of training its algorithms for its autonomous technology globally."

JOURNALISTS CRITICAL OF THEIR OWN COMPANIES CAUSE HEADACHES FOR NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

This spring, NBC News, The New York Times and National Public Radio have each dealt with turmoil for essentially the same reason: journalists taking the critical gaze they deploy to cover the world and turning it inward at their own employers.

Whistleblowing isn't unique to any industry. Yet the contrary outlook baked into many journalists — which can be a central part of their jobs — and generational changes in how many view activism have combined to make it probable these sort of incidents will continue.

NBC

In the past few weeks, NBC reversed a decision to hire former Republican National Committee chief Ronna McDaniel as a political contributor following a revolt by some of its best-known personalities. An NPR editor was suspended and then quit after critiquing his company's willingness to tolerate diverse viewpoints and an internal probe provoked by Gaza coverage ended at the Times.

Journalism as a profession attracts people who are anti-authoritarian, who see themselves as truth-tellers. Many believe the way to make an organization better is by criticizing it, said Tom Rosenstiel, co-author of "The Elements of Journalism" and a professor at the University of Maryland.

"We're taught to hold power to account," said Kate O'Brian, president of news for the E.W. Scripps Co.

IT'S IN THEIR NATURE

So was it really surprising to see Chuck Todd, who spent years questioning politicians on "Meet the Press," do the same to his bosses when there was resistance to putting McDaniel on the payroll? MSNBC's Rachel Maddow, Joy Reid, Joe Scarborough, Jen Psaki, Nicolle Wallace and Lawrence O'Donnell all joined a protest that was extraordinary for how it played out on the network's own airwaves.

National Public Radio editor Uri Berliner didn't receive much internal support for his complaints, but that actually reinforced his point. He said NPR had become too one-sided in promoting a liberal point of view, and that he went public with an essay in another news outlet when his concerns went unanswered by his superiors.

NPR management says he is wrong. But Berliner quickly became a hero among conservatives who hold the same belief.

Journalism history has many examples of meaningful internal protests. Women journalists sued in the 1970s to force The New York Times and The Associated Press to confront gender discrimination. Los Angeles Times journalists exposed a deal their company made to share profits with a sports arena from a special issue. A Chicago TV news anchor quit to protest her station's hiring of talk show host Jerry Springer as a commentator.

The 2020 death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police was a significant moment, forcing news organizations across the country to confront how they covered racial issues, both past and present, often at the prodding of their staff. It also forced a look at a lack of diversity in newsrooms.

There are several reasons why many journalists are more apt now to go public with complaints they may once have kept to sharing with colleagues down at the corner bar. Among them is the likelihood that their outlet is owned by a faraway hedge fund instead of a local family, said Joel Kaplan, associate dean for graduate studies at Syracuse University's Newhouse communications school and a former Chicago Tribune reporter.

A generational change also has emboldened many young journalists. In his own classroom, Kaplan sees more young journalists questioning traditional notions of objectivity that keep them

from expressing opinions. Many believe they have the right to state their beliefs and support causes, he said.

“Now you have journalists that are advocates,” Rosenstiel said. “That reflects something of a culture war that is happening inside of journalism.”

Debates over coverage of the Trump administration had a similar galvanizing effect.

“There are some journalists who say, ‘I’m not interested in covering conservatives because they are not interested in the truth,’” Rosenstiel said.

A BACKLASH TO THE BACKLASH

Some traditionalists, like former Washington Post editor Marty Baron, have despaired over some of these changes. Battles with young staff members over how they express their opinions over social media left him despondent, a factor in his eventual retirement.

“Never have I felt more distant from my fellow journalists,” he wrote about a staff meeting on the topic in his 2023 book, “Collision of Power.”

One of the most prominent thinkers on this issue, journalist Wesley Lowery, has written that some defenders of objectivity are more interested in inoffensiveness and appearance, less so on journalistic rigor.

“In pursuing objectivity, we silence the marginalized,” a Harvard student, Ajay V. Singh, wrote at the height of the debate. “In silencing the marginalized, we tip the narrative of ‘truth’ into the hands of the powerful.”

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The New York Times frequently has been at the forefront with journalists questioning their organization. In 2020, the newspaper's editorial page editor resigned after the newspaper disowned an opinion piece written by U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton about Floyd-related protests, following a staff protest. Some Times staff members also have spoken out intensely against the newspaper's coverage of gender issues.

Its executives, however, appeared to have lost patience with a debate surrounding another contentious issue: the war in Gaza.

They launched an internal investigation into who leaked material to an outside publication, the Intercept, about a podcast based on a late December article about Hamas and sexual violence. The podcast was never done. That angered some staff members who were concerned the Times was striking back against employees for doing something that its own reporters do on a regular basis: write stories based on leaked material.

Yet management of the Times viewed the action as a violation of trust, particularly the sharing of what was essentially drafts of material that never saw the light of day.

"Reporters, editors and producers need to be able to have candid exchanges and disagreements about the best way to tackle a difficult piece of journalism with the understanding that those exchanges will strengthen the story, not become the story," Joe Kahn, Times executive editor, said in a memo to staff on April 15. He said the probe concluded without determining who leaked the material.

Against this backdrop is another truth: The media itself and how it covers news are issues that interest the public more than in the past, creating the market for just the sort of material that Kahn was talking about — and for this story as well.

Because of the interest, and because of the journalism DNA that courses through the debate, there's likely to be no shortage of sources for such news, Rosenstiel said.

"Newsrooms," he said, "are full of people who are often disgruntled."

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FCC FINES WIRELESS CARRIERS FOR SHARING USER LOCATIONS WITHOUT CONSENT

The Federal Communications Commission has leveraged nearly $200 million in fines against wireless carriers AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon for illegally sharing customers' location data without their consent.

"These carriers failed to protect the information entrusted to them. Here, we are talking about some of the most sensitive data in their possession: customers' real-time location information, revealing where they go and who they are," FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said in a statement released this week.

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Officials first began investigating the carriers back in 2019 after they were found selling customers' location data to third-party data aggregators. Fines were proposed in 2020, but carriers were given time to argue against the claims before the fines were imposed.

The FCC argues that the four firms are required to take reasonable measures to protect certain consumer data per federal law.

"The FCC order lacks both legal and factual merit," AT&T said in a statement. "It unfairly holds us responsible for another company's violation of our contractual requirements to obtain consent, ignores the immediate steps we took to address that company's failures, and perversely punishes us for supporting life-saving location services like emergency medical alerts and roadside assistance that the FCC itself previously encouraged. We expect to appeal the order after conducting a legal review."

T-Mobile faces the largest fine at $80 million. Sprint, which merged with T-Mobile since the investigation began, received a $12 million charge. The FCC hit Verizon with a $47 million penalty, and AT&T was issued a $57 million fee.

AMAZON REPORTS STRONG 1Q RESULTS DRIVEN BY ITS CLOUD-COMPUTING UNIT AND PRIME VIDEO AD DOLLARS

prime

WSJ.

Amazon reported this week strong results for the first quarter, driven by growth in its cloud-computing unit and new advertising dollars from its Prime Video streaming service.

The Seattle-based e-commerce giant said it brought in $143.31 billion in revenue in the first three months of this year, a 13% jump compared to the same period last year. Net income came out to $10.43 billion, or 98 cents per share. That soundly beat Wall Street analysts' expectations for 84 cents a share, according to FactSet.

"It was a good start to the year across the business, and you can see that in both our customer experience improvements and financial results," Amazon CEO Andy Jassy said in a statement.

The nation's biggest online retailer is coming off better-than-expected results for the holiday shopping period, when it saw strong consumer spending aided by discounts and faster shipping speeds. Amazon held another discount event in late March, right before the end of the first quarter.

Overall, U.S. consumer spending has continued to grow despite higher prices and higher borrowing costs resulting from the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes. The nation's economy slowed down during the first three months of this year, but hiring has also remained robust.

Amazon's U.S. customers are being "very thoughtful" about their spending, Chief Financial Officer Brian Olsavsky said in a call with reporters. He noted consumers are looking for deals and trading down, and that the company is "particularly" seeing lower spending in Europe.

Aside from its core retail business, Amazon said first-quarter sales in its cloud computing unit, Amazon Web Services, amounted to $25.04 billion, up 17% from the same period last year.

AWS, whose customers are mostly businesses, has been the cornerstone of Amazon's strategy in the competitive artificial intelligence race among big tech companies. The unit saw a slowdown in growth last year as companies cut back on costs amid concerns about the economy. However, Amazon has been using its AI offerings to push back on that trend and attract more enterprises to its cloud business.

Jassy said AI capabilities have reaccelerated AWS' growth rate and it is now on pace for $100 billion in annual revenue.

Hours before Amazon released its earnings report on Tuesday, the company announced a full rollout of a business chatbot called Q that it says can help employees be more productive at work. Last month, it finished its $4 billion investment in San Francisco-based AI startup Anthropic, a competitor to Microsoft-allied OpenAI. Anthropic is collaborating with Amazon to develop so-called foundation models that underpin AI technologies.

Sales in the company's online advertising business also spiked 24%, majority of which is driven by advertising for sponsored products, Olsavsky said.

He said Amazon, which started showing advertisements on Prime Video in late January, currently has a "light" number of ads on the streaming service compared to TV or other streaming providers. Olsavsky said the ads, which customers can avoid with a $2.99

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additional monthly fee, are going well and "attracting a number of new advertisers who are not currently using Amazon advertising services."

Shares in Amazon.com Inc. rose about 2% in after-hours trading.

Under Jassy, Amazon has cut costs in different parts of its business to remain profitable. This year, the company cut hundreds of positions across AWS, Prime Video and MGM Studios. Its subsidiaries, the popular social media platform Twitch and the audiobook service Audible, have also laid off workers.

In addition, Amazon has also been facing regulatory hurdles. In January, the company called off a deal to purchase the robot vacuum maker iRobot after facing regulatory hurdles in Europe. It's also been sued by the Federal Trade Commission over antitrust concerns.

Amazon says it expects to post net sales between $144 billion and $149 billion during the second quarter. Analysts are expecting $150.2 billion, according to FactSet.

ELIMINATION OF TESLA’S CHARGING DEPARTMENT RAISES WORRIES AS EVS FROM OTHER AUTOMAKERS JOIN NETWORK

TESLA
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TESLA

Elon Musk's move to lay off the department responsible for Tesla's electric vehicle chargers has touched off worries in the auto industry that EVs from other automakers will have trouble joining Tesla's network.

Several leaders of Tesla's Supercharger team posted social media messages saying they were told Monday night that entire group of about 500 had been laid off by CEO Musk, who seemed to confirm the move in a posting Tuesday on X, the social media site he now owns.

"Unfortunately the charging organization at Tesla is no more," Lane Chaplin, who identified himself at a former leader of Tesla real estate acquisition for charging in North America, posed on LinkedIn.

The tech news site The Information, The New York Times and others reported that Musk told managers of the layoffs in an email.

Cutting the charging department raised questions in the industry about whether adding EVs from other automakers would work with no staff to support adding vehicles made by other automakers. But Ford, the first in the industry to sign up with Tesla, said its plans to join have not changed.

General Motors was a little more cautious. "We are continuing to monitor the situation regarding changes to the Supercharger team and the potential impacts," it said in a statement.

Nearly all other automakers selling electric vehicles in the U.S. have signed up to join Tesla's Supercharger network, which has the most plugs of any network in the nation. It also has stations strategically located along interstate highways and other travel corridors. Tesla has

2,261 fast-charging stations nationwide with 25,491 plugs, according to the Department of Energy.

Opening the network was seen as a big victory for Tesla, which would get added revenue from owners of EVs purchased from other companies. Expanding access to the network, which previously had been accessible only to Tesla owners, also helped to allay fears that there weren't enough charging stations for EV owners to travel without running out of juice. The industry also switched to Tesla's charging plug, which now has become the standard.

Sam Abuelsamid, principal e-mobility research analyst for Guidehouse Insights, said Musk's decision is puzzling because gutting the charging department comes just as hardware and software from other automakers is being integrated into Tesla's network. "To do that and maintain that, you need to have a staff that can go out there and keep the hardware running, keep the software working," he said.

There's a significant risk that Tesla's network will be less reliable, with EVs from other automakers having difficulty communicating with the chargers, Abuelsamid said.

Musk, he said, may see the Supercharger network as a money-loser despite opening it to other automakers, so he's cutting expenses there in an effort to restore profit margins, which have been reduced as EV sales have slowed.

There are significant costs for electricity, to install new chargers, and to maintain the network and keep it reliable, Abuelsamid said.

The New York Times
NIPPER'S QUALITY KITCHEN
EXPRESS SERVICE
DEAN & DELUCA

A message was left Wednesday seeking comment from Tesla on the impact of the cuts.

Tuesday on X, Musk wrote that Tesla still plans to add to the Supercharger network, “just at a slower pace for new locations and more focus on 100% uptime and expansion of existing locations.”

Musk has been cutting employees in an effort to slash costs amid falling sales and slowing demand for electric vehicles. Earlier this month the company said it would lay off about 10% of its global workforce of 140,000.

Shares of Tesla were down 1.2% this week. They have dropped in value by more than 27% so far this year, but had a bit of a rally in the past week after the company’s first-quarter earnings conference call.

SAMSUNG REPORTS A 10-FOLD INCREASE IN PROFIT AS AI DRIVES REBOUND IN MEMORY CHIP MARKETS

Samsung Electronics reported this week a 10-fold increase in operating profit for the last quarter as the expansion of artificial intelligence technologies drives a rebound in the markets for computer memory chips.

The South Korean semiconductor and smartphone giant said its operating profit for the Jan-March quarter came in at 6.6 trillion won ($4.8 billion), up from the 640 billion won ($465 million) it earned during the same period last year.

Revenue rose by nearly 13% to 71.9 trillion won ($52 billion), driven by higher prices for memory chips and robust sales of its flagship Galaxy S24 smartphones, the company said.

The company earned 1.91 trillion won ($1.38 billion) in operating profit from its semiconductor business, marking the division's first quarterly profit since the fourth quarter of 2022, as the chip market continues to recover from a cyclical slump deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic and global trade tensions.

Samsung projected the memory chip market to remain strong in the coming months, driven by the expansion of generative AI technologies, which is increasing the demand for both conventional chips used in servers and advanced chips designed to process AI, including high-bandwidth memory, or HBM.

Responding to higher demands for AI chips, Samsung said it started this month the mass production of its latest HBM chips, called 8-layer HBM3E, and that it plans to start producing the 12-layer version of the chips during the second quarter.

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“In the second half of 2024, business conditions are expected to remain positive with demand — mainly around generative AI — holding strong, despite continued volatility relating to macroeconomic trends and geopolitical issues,” Samsung said in a statement.

For smartphones, the company will continue to focus on boosting the sales of its flagship device, Galaxy S24, which is built with an array of new features enabled by AI, including live translation during phone calls in 13 languages and 17 dialects.

Samsung said it plans to expand AI features beyond the S24 to other mobile devices as it expects the technologies to drive growth in the smartphone market in coming months amid improvements in global consumer spending.

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LAWMAKERS AND ADVOCATES MAKE LAST-DITCH PUSH TO EXTEND AFFORDABLE INTERNET SUBSIDY

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Twenty-three million families in the U.S. will have bigger internet bills starting in May. That's because a federal broadband subsidy program they're enrolled in is nearly out of money.

Dozens of people joined Biden administration officials, advocates and U.S. Sen. Peter Welch, a Democrat from Vermont, at a Washington public library on Tuesday to make a last-ditch plea to extend the Affordable Connectivity Program, a subsidy created by Congress and touted by President Joe Biden as part of his push to bring internet access to every U.S. household. The program, which is set to expire at the end of May, helps people with limited means pay their broadband bills.

"They need access to high-speed internet just like they need access to electricity," Sen. Welch told the gathering. "This is what is required in a modern economy."

The Affordable Connectivity Program, which Congress created with $14.2 billion through the bipartisan infrastructure law, provided qualifying households with a subsidy of $30 a month to help pay their internet bills. Households on tribal land received up to $75.

That help will be slashed starting in May, when enrolled households will only receive partial credits toward their internet bills. Barring any Congressional action to infuse the Affordable Connectivity Program with more cash, the subsidies will end completely at the end of the month.

"The money has run out," FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks said at the event hosted by a group called Public Knowledge, a nonprofit proponent of broadband access. "Many households will have to face a tough choice: confront that rising internet bill or disconnect them and their household from the internet."

Nearly 80 percent of households enrolled in the program said they would have to switch to a lower-tier plan or cancel their internet service altogether without the benefit, according to a survey conducted by the FCC at the end of 2023. Many have come to depend on internet access to complete homework assignments, work from home and meet other basic needs.

"This is not about can we find the money," Sen. Welch said. "It's about, are we committed to the priority and well-being of really wonderful people who are struggling?"

Welch and other lawmakers from both political parties introduced legislation earlier this year to extend the program through the end of the year with $7 billion. The White House has pushed for an extension but it has not happened so far.

Public Knowledge
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THE TIKTOK LAW KICKS OFF A NEW SHOWDOWN BETWEEN BEIJING AND WASHINGTON. WHAT'S COMING NEXT?

TikTok is gearing up for a legal fight against a U.S. law that would force the social media platform to break ties with its China-based parent company, a move almost certainly backed by Chinese authorities as the bitter U.S.-China rivalry threatens the future of a wildly popular way for young people in America to connect online.

Beijing has signaled TikTok should fight what it has called a "robbers" act by U.S. lawmakers "to snatch from others all the good things that they have." Should a legal challenge fail, observers say Chinese authorities are unlikely to allow a sale, a move that could be seen as surrendering to Washington.

Beijing may not want the U.S. action against the popular short-form video platform to set a "bad precedent," said Alex Capri, senior lecturer at the National University of Singapore and research fellow at Hinrich Foundation. "If Beijing capitulates to the U.S., where does it end?"

In its first official response to the new law, parent company ByteDance delivered a statement on Toutiao — a Chinese news app it owns — stating it "doesn't have any plan to sell TikTok." The Beijing-based firm was responding to media reports that said it was exploring scenarios for selling TikTok's U.S. business.

The legislation that U.S. President Joe Biden signed last week could allow Washington to widen its scope to target other China-related apps, such as the popular e-commerce platform Temu, and embolden U.S. allies to follow suit, said Hu Xijin, a former editor-in-chief for the party-run newspaper Global Times.

With 170 million American users, TikTok should "have more guts to fight to the very end and refuse to surrender," Hu, now a political commentator, said on Chinese social media.

TikTok vowed to challenge the new U.S. law, which requires ByteDance to divest its stakes within a year to avoid a ban. The company has characterized the law as an infringement on the free speech rights of its users, most of whom use the app for entertainment.

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TikTok

"We believe the facts and the law are clearly on our side, and we will ultimately prevail," the company wrote on the social platform X.

The fight over TikTok has increased tensions between the U.S. and China, with both vowing to protect their economic and national security interests. U.S. lawmakers are concerned the Chinese ownership of the app could allow Beijing to exert unwanted influence in the U.S., especially on young minds. The law has followed a string of successes by Washington in curbing the influence of Chinese companies through bans, export controls and forced divestitures, drawing protests from Beijing that the U.S. is bent on suppressing China's rise through economic coercion.

The U.S. has forced other Chinese companies to divest before, including in 2020, when Beijing Kunlun, a Chinese mobile video game company, agreed to sell the gay dating app Grindr after receiving a federal order. But TikTok, created by a Chinese company only for the overseas market and evidence of the nation's tech powers on the global stage, is a high-profile case that Beijing does not want to lose.

National dignity is at stake and could "take precedence over the financial interests of ByteDance investors," including global investors who own 60% of the company, said Gabriel Wildau, managing director of the New York-headquartered consulting and advisory firm Teneo.

A legal challenge from the company is expected to lean on First Amendment concerns and could drag on for years. Beijing is betting on a legal win, analysts say.

Image: Christopher Sadowski

What to do if TikTok doesn't prevail is likely still being debated with the Chinese leadership, said Dominic Chiu, an analyst with Eurasia Group. President Xi Jinping, who will have to sign off on whether to permit or prohibit the sale, probably has not made the final decision, Chiu said.

Luckily for Xi, there is no urgency for Beijing to decide, said Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Washington-based Stimson Center. "A lot of things could change," she said.

If lawmakers get their wish and a sale does occur, it's likely to be a challenging and messy process for TikTok, which would have to disentangle its U.S. operations from everything else.

For one, the price tag for TikTok's U.S. business — which is unknown — is expected to be high enough to severely limit the pool of investors and companies who'd be able to afford it. Some investors — including former Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin — have already positioned themselves as potential buyers of a U.S. version of TikTok. ByteDance, which is privately held, is valued at $220 billion, according to market tracker Pitchbook.

And there’s uncertainty about what would happen with the TikTok algorithm, the secret sauce that feeds users short videos based on their interests and has contributed to the platform’s status as a cultural juggernaut.

ByteDance would be barred from controlling the algorithm of a U.S. spinoff of TikTok. Many experts believe Chinese authorities would block any sale of the technology that populates people’s TikTok feeds under export regulations revised in 2020, when then-President Donald Trump unsuccessfully tried to ban TikTok through an executive order that was blocked in federal courts.

Some, including Mnuchin, have said TikTok would need to be rebuilt in the U.S. using new technology. But it’s unclear what that might look like, or how well it can reproduce the type of video recommendations users have grown accustomed to seeing.

Robin Burke, a professor of information science at the University of Colorado Boulder, says some aspects of the algorithm might be replicated by industry insiders. But he also noted there are areas where TikTok appears ahead of its competitors and duplication might prove challenging.

“TikTok has all the experience, they have all the data,” Burke said. “I think it’s unlikely that a U.S. business — if they don’t inherit the technology from the parent company — would be able to build something equivalent. Certainly not right away.”

SCAMMERS STOLE MORE THAN $3.4 BILLION FROM OLDER AMERICANS LAST YEAR, AN FBI REPORT SAYS

Scammers stole more than $3.4 billion from older Americans last year, according to an FBI report released this week that shows a rise in losses through increasingly sophisticated criminal tactics to trick the vulnerable into giving up their life savings.

Losses from scams reported by Americans over the age of 60 last year were up 11% over the year before, according to the FBI's report. Investigators are warning of a rise in brazen

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schemes to drain bank accounts that involve sending couriers in person to collect cash or gold from victims.

"It can be a devastating impact to older Americans who lack the ability to go out and make money," said Deputy Assistant Director James Barnacle of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division. "People lose all their money. Some people become destitute."

The FBI received more than 100,000 complaints by victims of scams over the age of 60 last year, with nearly 6,000 people losing more than $100,000. It follows a sharp rise in reported losses by older Americans in the two years after the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, when people were stuck at home and easier for scammers to reach over the phone.

Barnacle said investigators are seeing organized, transnational criminal enterprises targeting older Americans through a variety of schemes, like romance scams and investment frauds.

The most commonly reported fraud among older adults last year was tech support scams, in which criminals pose over the phone as technical or customer service representatives. In one such scam authorities say is rising in popularity, criminals impersonate technology, banking and government officials to convince victims that foreign hackers have infiltrated their bank accounts and instruct them that to protect their money they should move it to a new account — one secretly controlled by the scammers.

Federal investigators saw an uptick between May and December of scammers using live couriers to take money from victims duped into believing their accounts had been compromised, according to the FBI. In those cases, scammers tell victims that their bank accounts have been hacked and that they need to liquidate their assets into cash or buy gold or other precious metals to protect their funds. Then the fraudsters arrange for a courier to pick it up in person.

“A lot of the the fraud schemes are asking victims to send money via a wire transfer, or a cryptocurrency transfer. When the victim is reluctant to do that, they’re given an alternative,” Barnacle said. “And so the bad guy will use courier services.”

Earlier this month, an 81-year-old Ohio man fatally shot an Uber driver he thought was trying to rob him after receiving scam phone calls, according to authorities.

The man had been receiving calls from someone pretending to be an officer from the local court who demanded money. The Uber driver had been told to retrieve a package from the man’s home, a request authorities say was possibly made by the same scam caller or an accomplice.

The staggering losses to older Americans are likely an undercount. Only about half of the more than 880,000 complaints reported to the FBI’s Internet Crime Compliance Center last year included information on the age of the victim.

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META UNDER FIRE FROM EUROPEAN UNION FOR NOT DOING ENOUGH ABOUT ELECTION DISINFORMATION

The European Union said this week that it's investigating Facebook and Instagram for suspected violations of the bloc's digital rulebook, including not doing enough to protect users from foreign disinformation ahead of EU-wide elections.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said it's opening formal proceedings into whether parent company Meta Platforms breached the Digital Services Act, a sweeping set of regulations designed to protect internet users and clean up social media platforms under threat of hefty fines worth up to 6% of annual revenue.

European authorities are scrambling to safeguard elections amid official warnings that Russia is seeking to meddle with the vote in June, when citizens of the bloc's 27 nations pick lawmakers for the European Parliament.

The investigation includes an urgent request for Meta to provide information about its move to discontinue a key tool for monitoring elections.

"We have a well established process for identifying and mitigating risks on our platforms," Meta said in a statement. "We look forward to continuing our cooperation with the European Commission and providing them with further details of this work."

Meta is being scrutinized "for suspected breach of DSA obligations to protect integrity of elections," European Commissioner Thierry Breton said in a social media post.

The Commission said it's looking into whether Meta is doing enough to curb the spread of "deceptive advertisements, disinformation campaigns and coordinated inauthentic behaviour" that could pose a risk to "electoral processes" and consumer protection.

Officials said they suspected Meta's content moderation system for advertisements was inadequate, allowing ads made with generative AI including deepfakes to exploited by malicious foreign actors seeking to meddle in elections even as the company makes money from them.

Experts worry that new generative AI systems could be used to disrupt the many

Meta
Meta

Meta

elections being held around the world this year, by supercharging the ability to spread disinformation at scale.

The EU also suspects that Facebook and Instagram might be reducing the visibility in recommendation feeds of political content from accounts that pump out a lot of it - a practice known as shadowbanning - and not being transparent about it with users, which would violate the DSA.

A third concern is Meta's decision to phase out Crowdtangle, a tool used by researchers, journalists and civil society groups for real-time monitoring of trending social media posts including during elections. The Commission is giving Meta five days to respond with information on how it will remedy the lack of such a tool.

The Commission is also investigating whether Meta's mechanism for users to flag illegal content is good enough under the DSA, because it suspects it's neither easy to access nor user-friendly.

Brussels has been cracking down on tech companies since the DSA took effect last year, opening investigations into social media sites TikTok and X and ecommerce platform AliExpress. TikTok bowed to EU pressure last week and halted a reward feature on its new app after the Commission started demanding answers about it.

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